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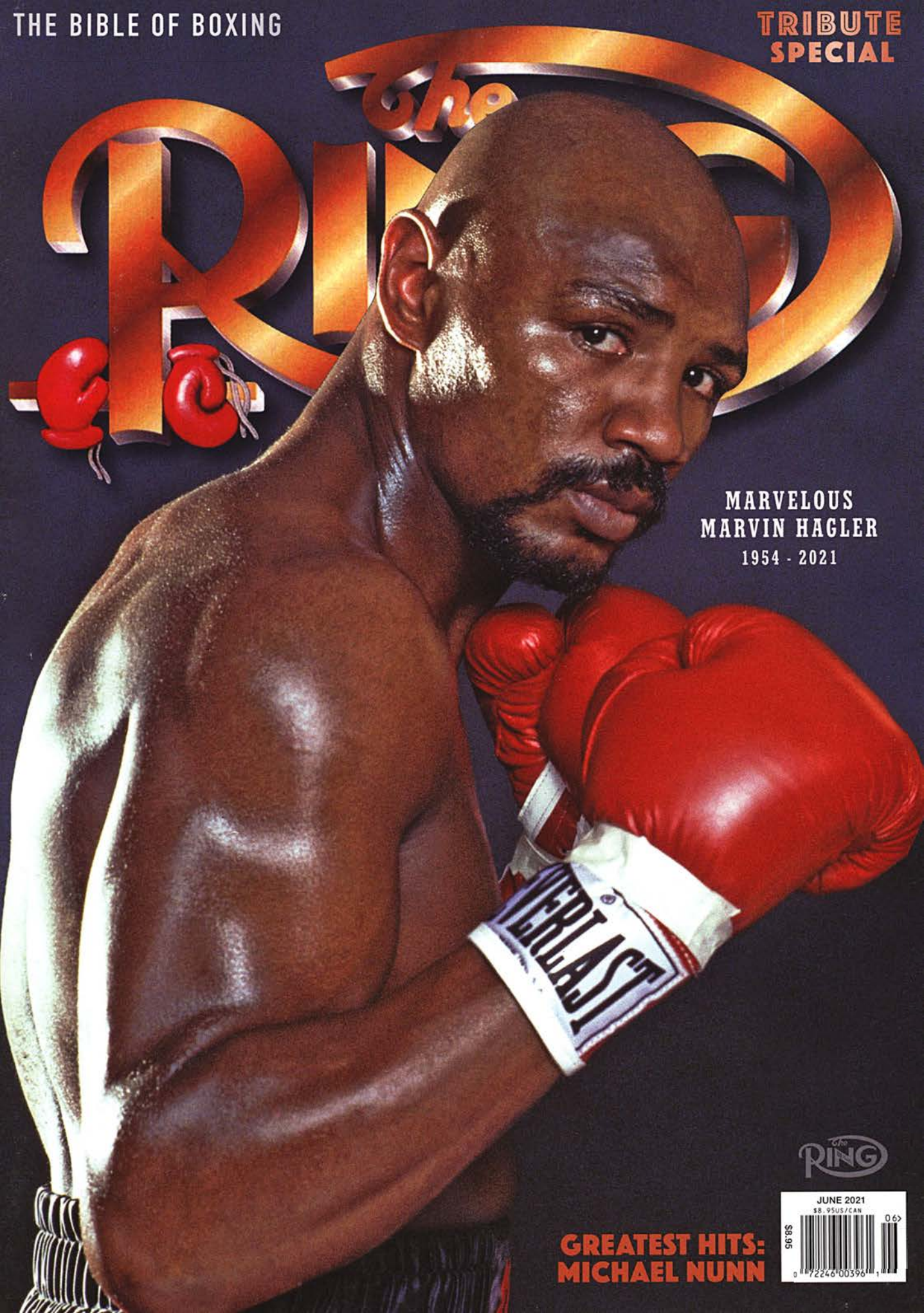

MARVELOUS MARVIN HAGLER
1954 - 2021

GREATEST HITS: MICHAEL NUNN

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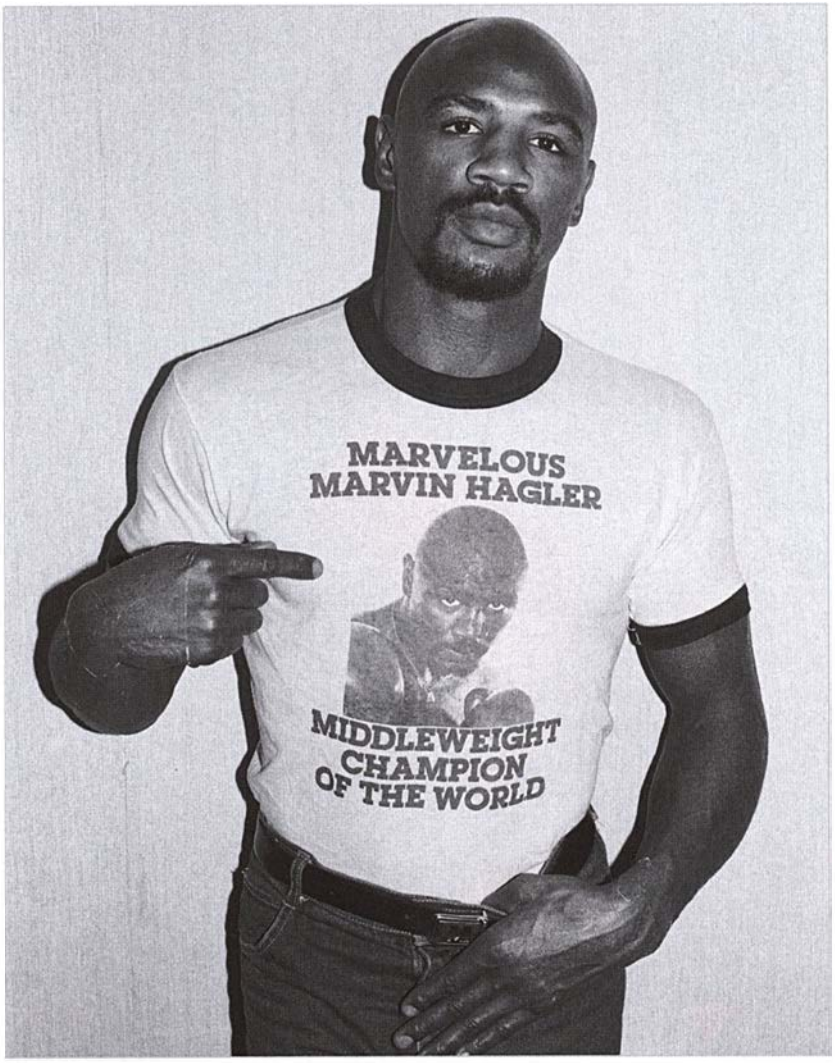
It was a long road to get there, but Marvelous Marvin Hagler was destined to be a champion.

COVER PHOTO BY MARIO SURIANI

Despite suffering a brutal knockout loss to Alexander Povetkin last summer, Dillian Whyte threw caution to the wind in their rematch and halted the Russian veteran in four rounds.

DAVE THOMPSON/MATCHROOM



MARVELOUS MEMORIES

When I heard the news that Marvelous Marvin Hagler had suddenly passed away, it was a real punch in the gut. Marvin was a major figure in my own budding boxing fandom in the early 1980s. I was 11 years old when he beat Alan Minter in London and just starting to really get into the fight scene. I can vividly recall watching all of his early title defenses on HBO and then going to the Capitol Theater in Passaic, New Jersey, to see his fight with Roberto Duran for my first closed-circuit experience. But the night that stands out the most is no surprise: his war with Thomas Hearns. This was another closed-circuit event for me, this time at the Meadowlands Racetrack. It was packed shoulder to shoulder, and when that first bell rang, the place was thick with excitement and anticipation. No one could have predicted what we would see unfold in real time over the next three minutes, and as it happened, it was like an electrical shock went right through that building. People were losing their ever-lovin' minds. It still stands today as the single most thrilling "live" sporting event I have ever witnessed in my life, an experience I will never, ever forget. Marvin remained my favorite of the Four Kings for the rest of his career. RIP Marvin. There will never be another as Marvelous as you!

Ted Cogswell
Everett, Wash.

I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Hagler in 1982 when he was in San Remo, Italy, training for the second Obelmejias fight. In those days prior to his relocation to Italy, he spoke no Italian, so I helped translate whenever possible. His training headquarters were in the hotel beneath my uncle's apartment, and I watched his preparations every day. He didn't say much before the fight, as he was ALL business, but afterwards we had our pictures taken together and he was so friendly and open. He shared his morning run with me: 10 miles with a military jacket with two-pound weights in the pockets and completed with boots on in UNDER an hour. That is insane for a boxer; if you have ever trained seriously, you will know what I mean. He also told me that the racist comments made by the asshole Alan Minter fired him up even more to punish the moron. What a tragic, tragic loss we suffered with Marvin's passing. I will always remember him as one of my favorite fighters of all time and a great human being. God bless his soul in Paradise.

Luigi Pelosi

No PEDs, no chiropractor, no masseuse, no fancy pad man, no nutritionist. Just boxing coaches, heavy bag, speed bag, sit-up board, sparring partners, willingness to learn and an iron determination, coupled with the desire to be GREAT. That was Marvelous

Scott Murray, of Premier Events UK, poses with Hagler at one of their speaking engagements in Britain.

That was Marvelous Marvin Hagler.

Augustus "Anecdotal Evidence" Tyler IV
Senior Heavyweight Champ

Following a very successful show with Marvelous on November 1, 2018, at my venue in Staffordshire, England, Hagler mentioned that he always wanted to visit Scotland, and as such I planned two shows for the following September at the Edinburgh Hilton and Glasgow Marriott. A true gentleman and professional, he was an exceptional after-dinner speaker talking about all his fights, including Sugar Ray! He was a fearsome monster in the ring, but deep down a good man. RIP Marvelous.

Scott Murray
Founder and Managing Director, Premier Events UK

★ ★ ★

ALI-FRAZIER ISSUE

Thanks for the comprehensive coverage of your April 2021 issue commemorating the 50th anniversary of the epic Frazier-Ali I encounter. As usual, the Bible of Boxing stepped up to its great "billing." However, I have to take an exception to your including the Ali-Doug Jones fight among Ali's "Greatest Hits" prior to the event. The Jones fight was for me probably one of Ali's poorest performances, during which his vulnerabilities were most exposed. Not just a few ringside observers felt Jones was actually robbed!

Damola Ifaturoti
Princeton, N.J.

What an issue. I finished it in one sitting. I still remember staying up late that school night and listening to the round-by-round summary. All the articles were well-written. However, I never realized how mean, nasty and cruel Ali was to Joe Frazier and his family. Calling him slow, ugly, a gorilla and Uncle Tom. This was more than trash talk; it was insulting and very hurtful. Frazier was a good man just trying to feed his family.

When Ali won his Olympic gold medal, a group of men with money backed him so he could train without working. When Frazier won the gold medal, at first he still had to work his $75-a-week job. Joe lent Ali money and advocated for him to get licensed. No doubt that Ali was a great boxer, but not a great person.

Walter Zabicki
Holly Ridge, N.C.

★ ★ ★

IT'S A START

I was relieved when I discovered The Ring had discontinued Ring Girl centerfolds. Is it not time to put a real woman boxer on the magazine cover, not an MMA devotee? And why are female boxers still relegated to the back pages of The Ring? Eliminating the centerfold is progress; let's see some more.

Adriana Delma
Waldport, Oregon

★ ★ ★

THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE

Nowadays, why does The Ring in its articles refer to every alphabet champ as a legitimate 'world' champion? There can only be one world champion at the time per division. A world champ is a world champ, an alphabet champ (however good he is) is an alphabet champ (until he aims for, and wins, the true title). I remember the days when The Ring editor Bert Sugar fought a war against the alphabet orgs, even leading to The Ring being banned from some fights. Integrity! The inflation of titles created by the alphabet orgs has really ruined the credibility of the sport. Why has today's The Ring succumbed to these orgs?

Bengt Frojd
Gothenburg, Sweden

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RINGSIDE BY TOM GRAY

FOR MARVIN'S SAKE, LET'S DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE 'JO JOS'

Hagler-Leonard was a great fight, but one lopsided official scorecard left a sour taste.

Marvelous Marvin Hagler was asked for his thoughts on three women being assigned to judge his 1984 rematch with Syrian slugger Mustafa Hamsho at Madison Square Garden. But a surly Hagler had no time for judges, male or female.

"These are my judges," seethed the undisputed middleweight champion, raising both fists.

In November 1979, the Brockton-based destroyer had to settle for a split decision draw with then-middleweight champion Vito Antuofermo, and he held a grudge. Hagler finally claimed the crown by annihilating Alan Minter the following year, and heading into the Hamsho return, he'd brutally stopped eight of nine challengers. "These are my judges" was not hyperbole – he meant every word.

When Hagler finally lost his cherished championship to Sugar Ray Leonard in April 1987, it was a WBC-appointed judge that let him down. Hagler-Leonard, no matter who you thought won, was a very close fight, but one blind mouse by the name of Jo Jo Guerra managed to award 10 of 12 rounds to Leonard (118-110). It is perhaps the most notorious scorecard in boxing history, and "The Marvelous One" was so repulsed that he never boxed again.

On March 13, 2021, the boxing world was rocked to its foundation by Hagler's sudden and tragic passing. On social media, tributes poured in from all over the world and served to highlight just how revered and respected the great former champion is within his sport and beyond. The Ring chose to postpone a Sugar Ray Robinson special edition that was already in the works in order to compile this memorial issue, and we didn't think twice about doing so.

Just hours after Hagler's death, Juan Francisco Estrada avenged a previous defeat and unified the junior bantamweight championship by posting a 12-round split decision win over Roman Gonzalez. Like Hagler-Leonard, it was a terrific prizefight, closely contested, and opinions varied on the outcome. However, once again, a ringside judge became part of the story. One Carlos Sucre scored nine rounds

for Estrada (117-111), suggesting that "Chocolatito" failed to turn up for work. Like Adalaide Byrd, who saw Canelo Alvarez winning 10 of 12 rounds against Gennadiy Golovkin in their controversial September 2017 draw, Sucre's card was an insult to any fight fan's intelligence.

But… STOP THE PRESS! This time, boxing took a stand.

Gilberto Mendoza, the WBA president, suspended Sucre pending an investigation. "We have to respect 'Gallo' Estrada, who made a great effort," said Mendoza. "In this case, the judges favored him. However, I sent a temporary suspension while Sucre is heard, because big shows and fights like this one do not deserve the kind of score he gave. His decision was misguided yesterday."

In a sport replete with problems, poor judging is currently angling for the top spot. It's not just a U.S. problem (Estrada-Gonzalez 2 was staged in Dallas); the U.K. has also seen some horrible officiating in recent months.

In February, Spain's Kiko Martinez ventured to London for a crossroads battle against highly touted prospect Zelfa Barrett. Martinez, 35, was considered over-the-hill, but the former junior featherweight titleholder hurt the youngster early, pressured him from bell to bell and maintained a frenetic pace throughout. The result? Barrett was given the nod on all three scorecards and two officials, Steve Gray and Bob Williams, voted 118-111 in his favor. Those numbers were miles away from reality, but there was no investigation, and both U.K. officials were back out scoring contests within a couple of weeks.

If that was bad, Lewis Ritson's 12-round split decision win over Mexico's former lightweight titleholder Miguel Vazquez last October was worse. Vazquez, 34, had been a reliable operator in his day, but he'd lost four of his previous seven outings and was in the twilight of a 51-fight career. Younger, fresher and in better form, Newcastle's Ritson was a heavy pre-fight favorite. Then the bell rang. Vazquez boxed brilliantly in almost every session and Ritson was chasing shadows. Beyond puzzling was that the home fighter's corner seemed quite pleased with how the fight was unfolding. "You're boxing very nice, considering you haven't been in the ring for a year," opined head trainer Neil Fannon between rounds nine and 10. That simply wasn't true. Ritson looked awful, but he was still given the verdict by two judges. One of them, Terry O'Connor, who gave the fight to the Englishman by a despicable tally of 117-111, was seen on the Sky Sports broadcast quickly glancing at what appeared to be a cellphone *during a round*. The veteran official was called before the British Boxing Board of Control a week later and denied that he was holding a handheld device. But when asked about the silly numbers he'd come up with, his answer left the BBBoC "satisfied that Mr. O'Connor's final score reflected his own opinion of the contest." Our favorite word, "subjective," saved the day, and O'Connor was back at ringside within two weeks.

It must be said that Matchroom's Eddie Hearn, promoter of these shows, publicly condemned the scoring that favored his fighters, but while that's amicable – even refreshing – it doesn't solve the problem long-term.

The WBA, which is off my Christmas card list until it drops a hoard of secondary world title belts, has at least made the right decision in suspending an inept official. Every governing body, commission or board should now follow suit when the numbers don't add up. Make it global. Maybe then judges will bring their A-game, and fighters, fans and media won't be covering their eyes and ears every time a contest goes to the scorecards.

The scoring for Lewis Ritson-Miguel Vazquez was widely condemned in the U.K. and beyond.

OWEN HUMPHREYS/PA IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

CO-FIGHTERS OF THE MONTH

Estrada (left) avenged his loss to Gonzalez in a classic, and a rubber match is imminent.

JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA AND ROMAN GONZALEZ

Between Roman Gonzalez outpointing Juan Francisco Estrada in a classic encounter in 2012 and their March 2021 rematch, the pair had combined for 31 wins and three losses and captured multiple world title belts in different divisions.

Despite being past the traditional prime for lower-weight fighters (Estrada is 30 and Gonzalez is 33) and the wear and tear they'd each accrued, the boxing world still expected a fan-friendly sequel between two of the sport's finest warriors at the American Airlines Center in Dallas.

"Chocolatito" and "El Gallo" would exceed all expectations.

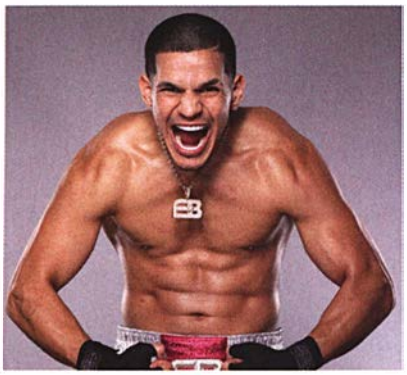
Mexico's Estrada entered as the Ring Magazine junior bantamweight champion and WBC titleholder, whereas Nicaragua's Gonzalez brought the WBA version to the party. From the opening round, Gonzalez applied constant pressure, created angles that only a master craftsman could and released scores of those brilliant signature flurries. By way of response, Estrada utilized his counterpunching finesse with the accuracy and professionalism of a bomb-disposal expert seeking to defuse an atomic device.

There were no knockdowns and neither fighter was seriously hurt, but the action was of the highest caliber, and a restricted crowd of approximately 2,500 fans was left awestruck. Estrada avenged his second professional defeat by 12-round split decision, but there were many who felt the verdict should have gone the other way.

"[Srisaket Sor] Rungvisai is a [WBC] mandatory, so I'll look at that," the winner said afterward, "but I'll approach a third fight any day with 'Chocolatito.'"

It's just as well that Estrada is willing, because the WBC has handed him their "Franchise" distinction and set a vacant title fight between Sor Rungvisai and Carlos Cuadras. The intention there is to make way for the Estrada-Gonzalez rubber match, and regardless of the ludicrous political side of that move, there's not a sane fight fan out there who doesn't want to see this one again.

Estrada and Gonzalez were just amazing.



MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

NEW FACES:

EDGAR BERLANGA

By **Anson Wainwright**

AGE: 23
HOMETOWN: Brooklyn, New York
WEIGHT CLASS: super middleweight
HEIGHT/ REACH: 6-foot-1 (185 cm) / 73 in. (185 cm)
AMATEUR RECORD: 162-17
TURNED PRO: 2016
PRO RECORD: 16-0 (16 knockouts)
TRAINER: Andre Rozier
MANAGER: Keith Connolly
PROMOTER: Top Rank
INSTAGRAM: @realedgarberlanga

BEST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: Berlanga is most pleased with his first-round knockout of Eric Moon inside The Bubble at the MGM Grand in July 2020.

"I feel that fight really pushed me out there," Berlanga told The Ring. "I got very recognized as a fighter after that fight.

"The way I ended him was amazing. I pulled his left glove down and I knocked him out with two shots. That was my most favorite fight in my career."

WORST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: It's difficult to single out a fight that you are unhappy with when you have stopped all your opponents inside the opening round. However, the Brooklyn-born fighter feels he's been a little overeager on a couple of occasions.

"There's probably three fights I wasn't too happy with," he said. "Sometimes when I see a fighter I hurt, I get out of character. My December fight [against Ulises Sierra] was one of them. I feel I could have stopped him earlier. I had him hurt and was going for the knockout instead of remaining calm. When I [calmed down], I stopped him."

WHY HE'S A PROSPECT: Berlanga regularly spars with rising prospect Nikita Ababiy and middleweight contender Sergiy Derevyanchenko. He was Derevyanchenko's chief sparring partner ahead of his 2019 fight with Gennadiy Golovkin.

Berlanga hits hard, obviously, but he insists that fight-ending power is only part of the bigger picture.

"People haven't really seen it but I'm a really good counterpuncher," he said. "They only think it's power. They don't know I'm a real boxer; I like to hit and not get hit. The fundamentals, it's a science. Everybody around the world has only seen one round, but my biggest asset is boxing. I'm a real knockout artist, but what comes with this power is tremendous skill."

Two-division titleholder Tim Bradley, who now serves as a commentator for ESPN, has witnessed several of Berlanga's fights live and has been impressed.

"We know he has the power, and it seems to be real," said Bradley. "When he hits these guys, they seem to have that 'Oh, shoot' look on their face, like the power is something they've never felt before.

"The last few fights I've seen him fight, he looks like he has the goods. He has a certain presence outside the ring. He has everything going for him to be a global superstar, but we have to see him against the 'B' and eventually the 'A' guys at the top. Then we'll be able to tell.

"I would love to see him against a guy like David Lemieux, Steve Nelson or Andre Dirrell. These are guys who've been around the block for some time."

WHY HE'S A SUSPECT: Bradley agrees that Berlanga was in too much of a rush once he hurt Sierra.

"The last fight, he got a little bit beside himself trying to go for that knockout in the first round," explained Bradley. "He made a ton of mistakes, attacking off-balance, just winging shots and exposing himself. He was trying to force the knockout instead of letting it develop naturally like it's supposed to.

"When you have that type of punching power, you can basically depend on it a little bit too much. What happens when he gets in there with a guy who he hits and doesn't go anywhere and then hits back?"

Bradley also has a few other questions that need answering.

"We haven't seen him in deep waters yet," said the retired former titleholder. "Can he make proper adjustments inside the ring? If he was to get knocked down, does he have what it takes inside to get back up and fight and win? Does he have the stamina in the second half of a fight? We don't know.

"It's been fun so far, easy money knocking these guys out in one round, but it's under the bright lights where you're going to gather experience with those 10-ounce gloves."

STORYLINES: Berlanga grew up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

"It was pretty rough," he said. "I lived in the projects all my life. Low-income, people on section 8 [housing assistance], people on welfare – those are the type of people from the projects. I'm from there, so I embrace that and feel that's what made me.

"You had a lot of crackheads out there, young kids selling drugs. It never phased me, because I was always in the gym and got respect from those types of guys because of what I was doing."

Berlanga hopes to one day emulate his boxing hero, Felix Trinidad, whom he visited in Puerto Rico last year.

"The main goal is to become a world champion," he explained. "I want to be that guy, the face of Puerto Rico, the face of boxing. I know that's big shoes to fill, but if everything in life was easy, everybody would be doing it. It's only one percent that does it, and I feel I'm that one guy.

"I'm young, I'm handsome, I can fight, I have a big fan base and that's me not having a world championship."

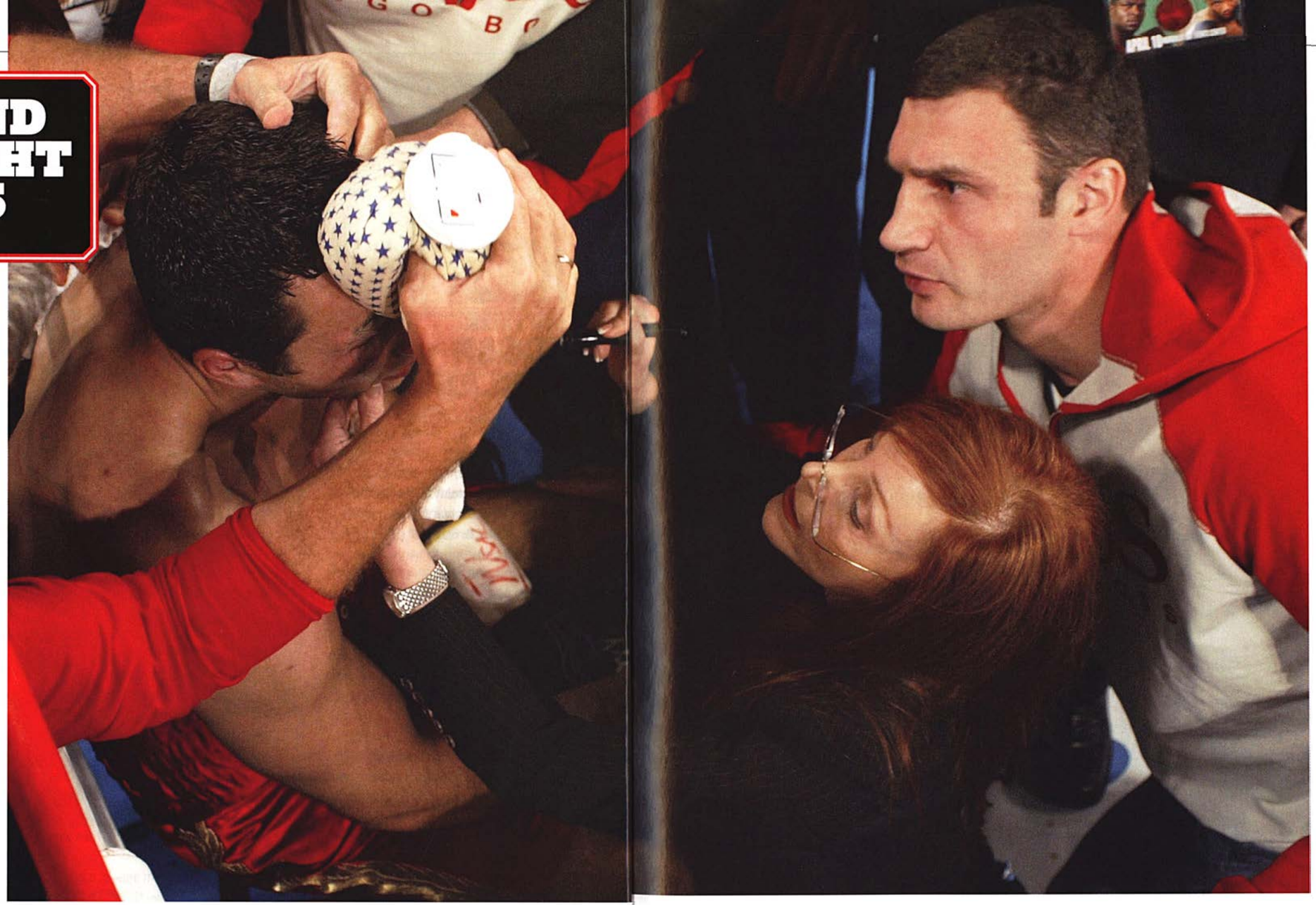
Berlanga's main focus is boxing, but he has a young family. His wife is expecting a baby in mid-June. He also likes to relax and go on vacation and is really into music, something he hopes to follow up on when his boxing career is over.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

THE DOCTOR IS IN



Boxing has always been a male-dominated sport.

When we think of great fighters, we think of men like Sugar Ray Robinson, Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali. Great promoters? Tex Rickard, Don King and Bob Arum. Trainers? Ray Arcel, Eddie Futch and Emanuel Steward. Michael Buffer is the greatest ring announcer ever. And so it goes.

The first woman enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame was Aileen Eaton (2002). She got into boxing promotion with her husband. Like Eaton, promoters Lorraine Chargin (2018) and Kathy Duva (2020) had accomplishments in their own right. But the foundation stone for their respective careers was set with their husband.

This year's selection of Laila Ali and Ann Wolfe brings the number of women in the IBHOF "women's modern" category to four. There are three "women's trailblazers" in Canastota with the addition of Marian Trimiar and Jackie Tonawanda.

That's it. Ten women out of 485 inductees.

No! Make that 11.

This year's induction class includes Dr. Margaret Goodman.

Goodman, a neurologist by trade, was a ringside physician for the Nevada State Athletic Commission for well over a decade and chair of the NSAC Medical Advisory Committee for six years. In late 2011, she founded the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association (VADA), which has become boxing's gold standard in testing for illegal performance-enhancing drugs. In 2017, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Goodman with the Barney Nagler Award for Long and Meritorious Service to Boxing. She and co-recipient Flip Homansky were previously honored by the BWAA with the James A. Farley Award for Honesty and Integrity.

Dr. Goodman's influence in the sport is undeniable and unshakable.

The most influential ring doctor ever and the first physician selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame is a woman.

★ ★ ★

On October 29, 1984, I found myself in the five-story Manhattan townhouse that served as headquarters for Don King Productions. For six months, I'd been tracking WBC 140-pound champion Billy Costello, Mike Jones (Billy's manager) and trainer Victor Valle while researching *The Black Lights* (my first book about professional boxing). Costello had been scheduled to defend his title on November 3 against Leroy Haley. Now, at the last minute, King was attempting to orchestrate a change in opponents to the more dangerous Saoul Mamby.

Jones was resisting the change. Mike and I were in King's office, which looked as though it had been furnished by a Hollywood set designer. There was a red carpet, plush leather sofas, a formica-topped desk and glass-topped conference table with two huge American flags standing in the background. The wall opposite the door was primarily windows. An adjacent wall bore 60 plaques awarded to King by various civic and boxing organizations. Three color televisions rested on a wall unit to one side of the door. A fully stocked bar was on the other. The ceiling and another wall were fully mirrored.

King sat at his desk, dressed in brown slacks, a white shirt with faint brown stripes and a brown silk tie. He was pulling out all the stops. Pleading, threatening, cajoling, his words coming incredibly fast, each one enunciated with the ring of a carnival barker. But as Jones continued to resist the change in opponents, King's tone grew ugly.

"Who do you think you are, motherfucker? You're a liar, man. You know that. Fuck you, man. Fuck you. You're gonna be a fat, rich white boy living out on Long Island and your fighter will be hungry."

A Shakespearean rage was building. King picked the telephone off his desk and slammed it down. Papers flew. The receiver spun off and twisted wildly, dangling in midair.

And then, in the midst of it all, King looked in my direction and blurted out, "That white motherfucker with the yellow pad is writing down every word I say."

★ ★ ★

DOUG BENC

Emanuel Steward with his most famous student, Thomas Hearns.

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM GREAT TRAINERS

JACK "CHAPPIE" BLACKBURN: "You gotta throw away your heart when you put on those boxing gloves or the other fella will knock it out of you."

CHARLEY GOLDMAN: "The part I like best is starting from the beginning with a green kid and watching him develop. It's like putting a quarter in one pocket and taking a dollar out of the other."

EMANUEL STEWARD: "I make my living by producing winners. That's what I do, so I know what I'm talking about. But the key in boxing isn't the sculptor. It's the marble."

EDDIE FUTCH (when asked how far he could take Duane Bobick): "I'm a trainer, not a magician."

★ ★ ★

A lot of people – and I'm one of them – think that Jerry Izenberg is on the short list of best sportswriters ever. Now, at age 90, Izenberg has ventured into new territory with a full-length novel.

After the Fire (published by Admission Press) is set in Newark in the aftermath of the 1967 riots that tore the city apart. It's a love story about the relationship between a young Italian-American man and his Black girlfriend that plays out against the backdrop of a heated mayoral race between three unscrupulous candidates who represent different ethnic interests and different points of view. The plot covers a lot of ground – race relations, young love, Black nationalism, white backlash. There are mob bosses, a cameo appearance by Frank Sinatra and characters based on members of the boxing community ranging from publicist Fred Sternburg to Izenberg himself.

"I always wanted to write a novel," Izenberg says, explaining the genesis of *After the Fire*. "And I figured I should write about what I know. I know Newark because I grew up there. I covered the riots. I know a little about Black-white love affairs because Aileen and I have been married for 42 years. So I gave it a try."

Izenberg writes well. The storyline moves swiftly and smoothly. Is another novel on the way?

"I don't know," Jerry answers. "I'd love to, but I'm 90 years old, so I have to choose my projects carefully. I want to write a book about Larry Doby (who played for the Newark Eagles before becoming the second African American to play Major League Baseball in the modern era). And I'd like to write a book about prejudice in America. The working title for that one is *Made in America*. So we'll see."

Meanwhile, *After the Fire* gives readers a chance to see another side of this multi-talented man. RING

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Staredown: Another Year Inside Boxing – *was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.*

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BROOKLYN IN THE HOUSE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK** • TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**

Brooklyn produced a trio of heavyweight titleholders. Mike Tyson, Riddick Bowe and Shannon Briggs were born and spent their formative years in the borough. But Brooklyn has given birth to champions in other weight divisions too. The men pictured on these pages are among them.

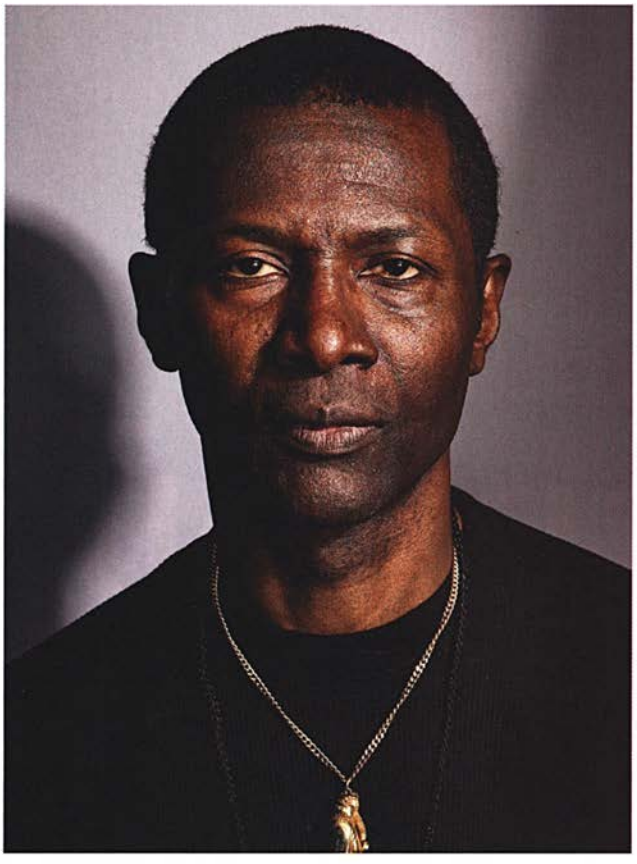
Mark Breland was one of the most decorated amateurs ever. He won five New York Golden Gloves titles and a gold medal at the 1984 Olympics en route to compiling a 110-1 amateur record. After turning pro, he twice claimed the WBA welterweight crown.

Junior Jones was a two-time New York Golden Gloves champion and moved into the spotlight with five fights on HBO when the network was "the heart and soul of boxing." Jones decisioned Orlando Canizales. Then he handed Marco Antonio Barrera the Mexican icon's first defeat to claim the WBO junior featherweight crown. Five months after that, Jones bested Barrera again in a rematch. Losses in thrilling fights against Kennedy McKinney and Erik Morales during the infancy of Boxing After Dark followed.

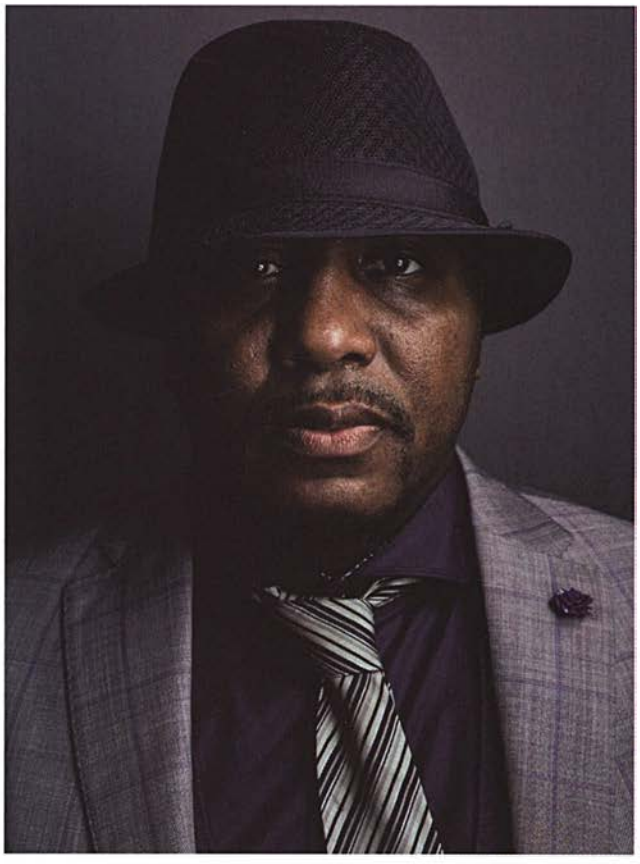
THE FACE OF BOXING

Danny Jacobs won four New York Golden Gloves championships and claimed 160-pound belts with victories over Jarrod Fletcher (WBA) and Sergiy Derevyanchenko (IBF). But he came up short against Gennadiy Golovkin in 2017 and Canelo Alvarez in 2019 in bids to establish supremacy in the middleweight division. Now Jacobs is campaigning at 168 pounds.

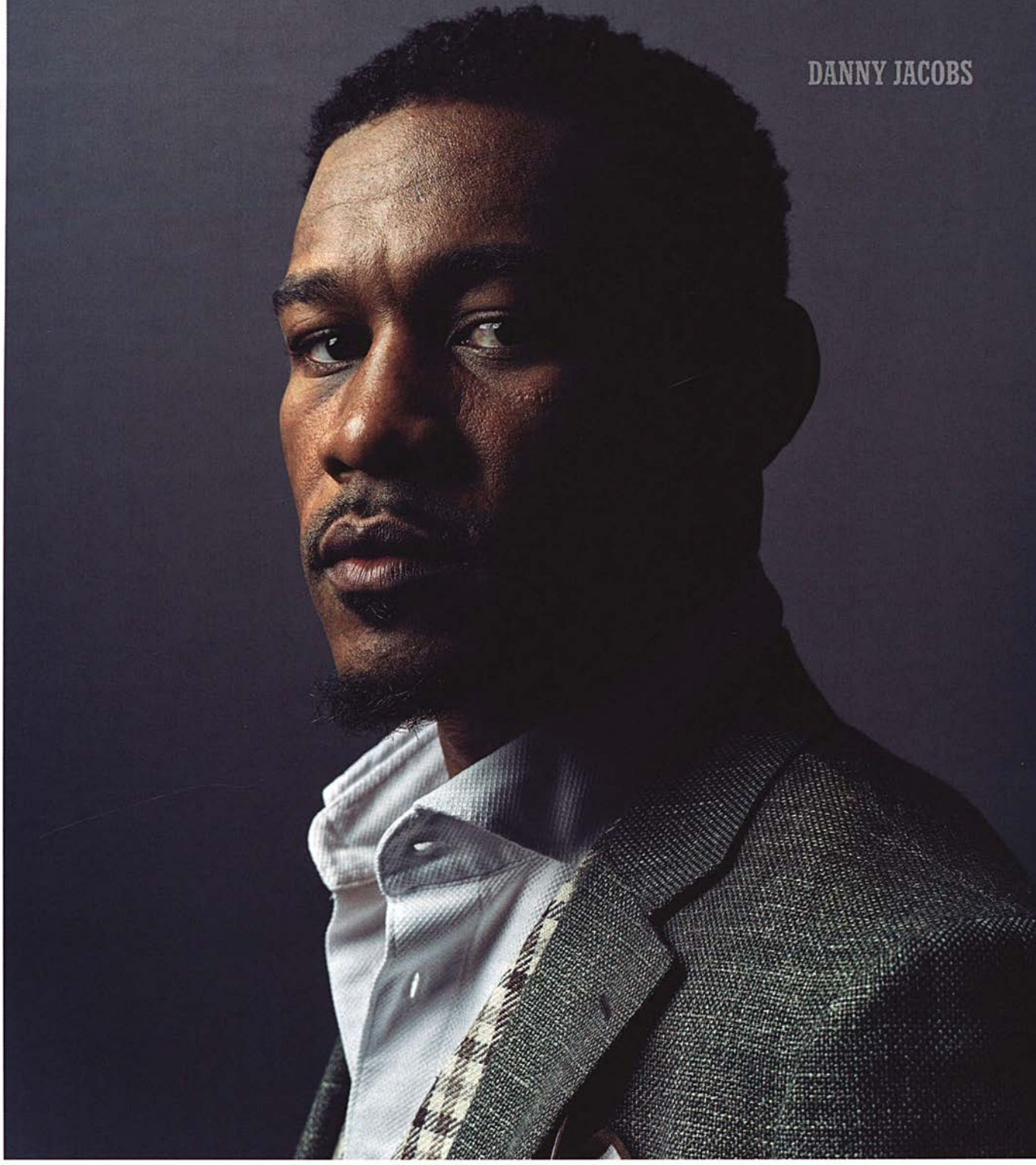
Ironically, these men rarely fought in Brooklyn. Breland traded blows in the borough once in 39 professional bouts. That was near the end of his career against Ricardo Smith at the



MARK BRELAND



JUNIOR JONES



Schwartz Athletic Center on the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University. Jones, in 56 pro outings, never fought in Brooklyn. Jacobs has had 40 pro fights to date, six of which have been at Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

"Brooklyn has a certain pride," Wojtek Urbanek says. "I feel it, and not just when I'm in the arena. It's in restaurants, in bars, on the streets. It's all races and religions and people from different backgrounds coming together."

That said, the fans at Barclays Center often cheer more enthusiastically for fighters from Poland or Ukraine than for fighters from Brooklyn.

And a note in closing . . . Mike Tyson, Riddick Bowe and Shannon Briggs have 167 fights on their collective ring resume. Only one of these bouts was contested in Brooklyn. That was Bowe's first-round knockout of Anthony Hayes at Gleason's Arena in Riddick's seventh pro fight.

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RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of March 27, 2021

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS BY BRIAN HARTY

POUND FOR POUND: Juan Francisco Estrada's split decision over Roman Gonzalez lifted him from No. 8 to No. 7, and it didn't matter that some members of the Ratings Panel thought Gonzalez should've won; even they couldn't argue against rewarding such a brilliant performance.

HEAVYWEIGHT: Joseph Parker (No. 7 last month) got a one-rank promotion after he scored a unanimous decision over fellow Kiwi Junior Fa (unrated) – not mind-blowing, but a solid enough win.

Dillian Whyte stopped Alexander Povetkin (No. 3 last month) in four rounds, leading some on the panel to wonder if Povetkin's long tenure at the elite level has finally come to an end. The Russian veteran fell to No. 8 and Whyte went from No. 4 to No. 3.

CRUISERWEIGHT: Lawrence Okolie picked up a belt and rose from No. 6 to No. 3 after a surprisingly dominant stoppage of Krzysztof Glowacki, who plunged from No. 3 to No. 8.

Is winning a wide unanimous decision over a Russian hero in Russia a praiseworthy accomplishment? The panel thought so, promoting Thabiso Mchunu from No. 7 to No. 4 after the South African handed Olympic gold medalist Evgeny Tischenko his first pro defeat.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: Artur Beterbiev held the No. 1 spot with a forgettable but effective 10th-round stoppage of Adam Deines.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Fedor Chudinov (No. 7 last month) fought to a draw with perennial gatekeeper Isaac Chilemba but didn't look great, so the panel decided to drop the former titleholder from Russia down to No. 9. Similarly, No. 4-rated Anthony Dirrell was lowered to No. 5 after an uninspiring split draw against Kyrone Davis (unrated), although some members of the panel thought Dirrell won the fight.

There were no deviations from the script as 168-pound champion Canelo Alvarez rolled over unrated Avni Yildirim, whose corner surrendered after three rounds of wishful thinking. With that out of the way, Canelo is now set to face WBO titleholder Billy Joe Saunders (No. 4) on May 8.

David Benavidez honored his position at No. 1 with a stoppage of Ronald Ellis (unrated) in the 11th round.

WELTERWEIGHT: An impressive seventh-round knockout of Maurice Hooker (unrated) was enough to get undefeated Vergil Ortiz on the list at No. 10, where he replaced Mikey Garcia.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: Kiryl Relikh (No. 8) was dropped for inactivity, his last fight being in April 2019. His removal happily coincided with a solid performance from Robert Easter Jr., who outboxed Ryan Martin (unrated) to a wide unanimous decision, so Easter took the vacancy at No. 10.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: Despite going in as the underdog, former featherweight titleholder Oscar Valdez was already well on his way to taking the WBC title from Miguel Berchelt (No. 1 last month) as the 10th round ticked away. And then Valdez countered with a monster hook that you'll be hearing more about when it's time to nominate candidates for Knockout of the Year. The performance had some members of the panel saying he should enter the list at No. 1 and even be considered for pound-for-pound inclusion, but ultimately he settled below the more proven Gervonta Davis at No. 2. Berchelt dropped to No. 4 and No. 10-rated Rene Alvarado was pushed out.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: The top three saw action, but the numbers didn't change. Estrada and "Chocolatito" held their respective positions at Champion and No. 2 after what could conceivably become the Fight of the Year, and Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (No. 1) stayed sharp with a third-round stoppage of unrated Ekkawit Songnui in Thailand. An Estrada-Gonzalez rubber match could be next.

FLYWEIGHTS: McWilliams Arroyo rose from No. 10 to No. 9 and moved to within arm's reach of another title shot with a fifth-round stoppage of Abraham Rodriguez (unrated).

STRAWWEIGHT: Pedro Taduran slipped from No. 9 to No. 10 after losing his IBF belt to countryman Rene Mark Cuarto, who prevailed by a slim but unanimous decision. Cuarto jumped onto the list at No. 9, which meant that Melvin Jerusalem (No. 10 last month) had to move out.

★ ★ ★

WOMEN'S RATINGS: Claressa Shields became the Ring champion at 154 pounds with a 10-round shutout of Marie-Eve Dicaire (No. 2 last month), though the fact that Dicaire became the new No. 1 in such clear defeat should say something about Shields' potential "GWOAT" status, as one panelist put it.

At welterweight, Jessica McCaskill captured the inaugural Ring belt with a debate-ending victory over Cecilia Braekhus in their rematch. McCaskill also smashed into the pound-for-pound rankings with her victory, taking Braekhus' No. 3 spot and swatting her down to No. 7.

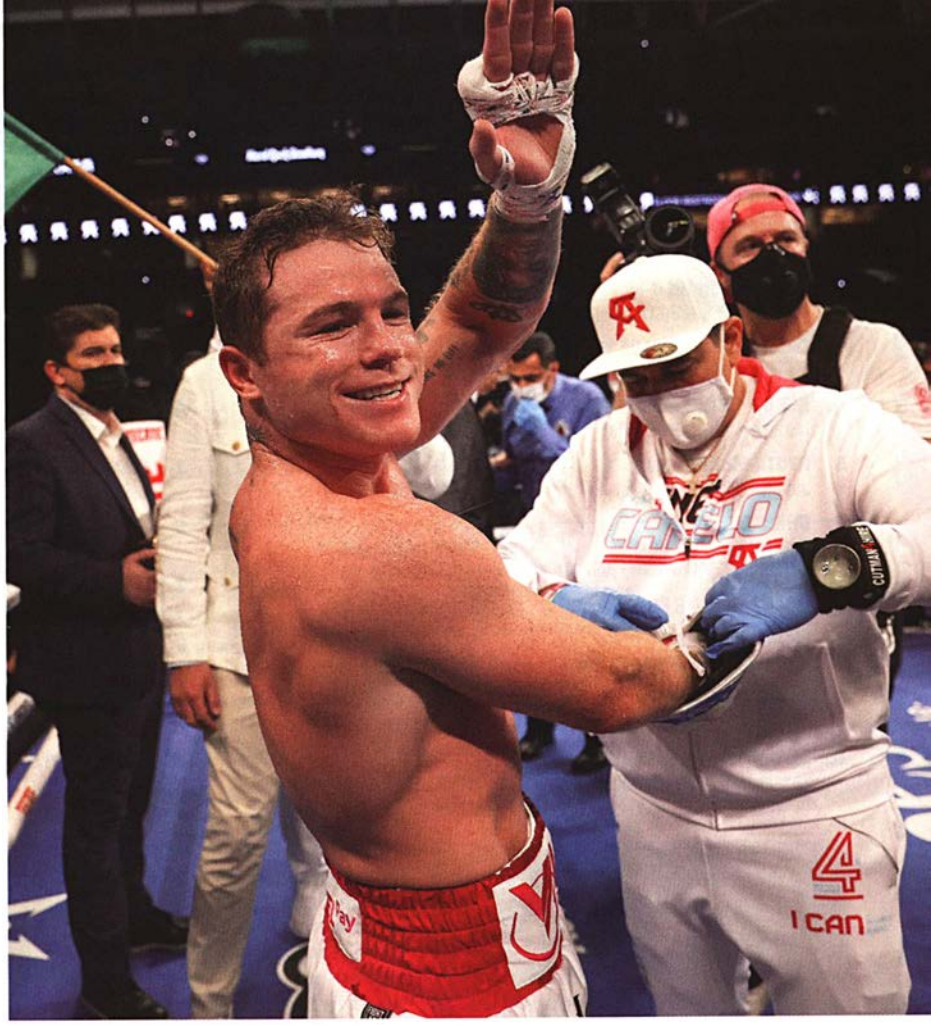
McCaskill was then leapfrogged by featherweight Amanda Serrano, who took No. 3 after knocking out fellow pound-for-pounder Daniela Bermudez, who performed admirably and held her position at No. 8 on the P4P list. Serrano's ninth-round knockout was impressive enough for multiple panelists to say that the Puerto Rican star (she's also No. 1 at 126 and currently holds a record of 40-1-1 with 30 KOs) could in fact be the best fighter in the world.

Mexican veteran Jackie Nava assumed the No. 1 spot at 122 pounds, surpassing Marcela Acuna, with a unanimous decision over Karina Fernandez.

Seniesa Estrada gave up her No. 5 spot at junior flyweight (which went to Kim Clavel) in order to fight at 105 pounds, but it proved to be a good move. The Los Angeles native, undefeated at 20-0, grabbed her first title and became the new strawweight No. 1 with a complete rout of Anabel Ortiz on the scorecards. Ortiz, who was dropped by a right to the chin in Round 2, slipped to No. 4.

P4P

1. **CANELO ALVAREZ**
   Mexico • 55-1-2 (37 KOs)
2. **NAOYA INOUE**
   Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
   U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
4. **ALEKSANDR USYK**
   Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
5. **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
   U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
6. **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
   U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
7. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
   Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
8. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
   Ukraine • 14-2-0 (10 KOs)
9. **JOSH TAYLOR**
   U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
10. **KAZUTO IOKA**
    Japan • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)



Pound-for-pound king Canelo Alvarez disposed of hapless WBC mandatory challenger Avni Yildirim in three rounds and is looking ahead to significantly tougher challenges.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- **C** **TYSON FURY** RING, WBC
  U.K. • 30-0-1 (21 KOs)
- **1** **ANTHONY JOSHUA** IBF, WBA, WBO
  U.K. • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **DEONTAY WILDER**
  U.S. • 42-1-1 (41 KOs)
- **3** **DILLIAN WHYTE**
  U.K. • 28-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **LUIS ORTIZ**
  Cuba • 32-2-0 (27 KOs)
- **5** **JOSEPH PARKER**
  New Zealand • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **ANDY RUIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 33-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **7** **MICHAEL HUNTER**
  U.S. • 19-1-1 (13 KOs)
- **8** **ALEXANDER POVETKIN**
  Russia • 36-3-1 (25 KOs)
- **9** **OSCAR RIVAS**
  Colombia • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **10** **ALEKSANDR USYK**
  Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- **C** **MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF
  Latvia • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **1** **YUNIEL DORTICOS**
  Cuba • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC
  Congo • 28-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **3** **LAWRENCE OKOLIE** WBO
  U.K. • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **4** **THABISO MCHUNU**
  S. Africa • 23-5-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **KEVIN LERENA**
  S. Africa • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **ANDREW TABITI**
  U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **7** **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** WBA
  France • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **8** **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI**
  Poland • 31-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **9** **ALEKSEI PAPIN**
  Russia • 12-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **MICHAL CIESLAK**
  Poland • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC
  Russia • 16-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **2** **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA
  Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **SERGEY KOVALEV**
  Russia • 34-4-1 (29 KOs)
- **4** **JOE SMITH JR.**
  U.S. • 26-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **5** **JEAN PASCAL**
  Canada • 35-6-1 (20 KOs)
- **6** **BADOU JACK**
  Sweden • 23-3-3 (13 KOs)
- **7** **ELEIDER ALVAREZ**
  Colombia • 25-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **MARCUS BROWNE**
  U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **UMAR SALAMOV**
  Russia • 25-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **10** **LYNDON ARTHUR**
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA, WBC
  Mexico • 55-1-2 (37 KOs)
- **1** **DAVID BENAVIDEZ**
  U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **CALEB PLANT** IBF
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **CALLUM SMITH**
  U.K. • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** WBO
  U.K. • 30-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **5** **ANTHONY DIRRELL**
  U.S. • 33-2-2 (24 KOs)
- **6** **JOHN RYDER**
  U.K. • 29-5-0 (16 KOs)
- **7** **DAVID LEMIEUX**
  Canada • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
- **8** **DANIEL JACOBS**
  U.S. • 37-3-0 (30 KOs)
- **9** **FEDOR CHUDINOV**
  Russia • 23-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **10** **EDGAR BERLANGA**
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (16 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF
  Kazakhstan • 41-1-1 (36 KOs)
- 2 **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 31-0-0 (22 KOs)
- 3 **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 29-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 4 **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-3-0 (10 KOs)
- 5 **RYOTA MURATA** WBA
  Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 7 **ROB BRANT**
  U.S. • 26-2-0 (18 KOs)
- 8 **LIAM WILLIAMS**
  U.K. • 23-2-1 (18 KOs)
- 9 **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 36-0-0 (29 KOs)
- 10 **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- C **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, WBC, IBF, WBA
  U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 1 **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 2 **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 27-3-3 (15 KOs)
- 3 **BRIAN CASTANO** WBO
  Argentina • 17-0-1 (12 KOs)
- 4 **JEISON ROSARIO**
  Dom. Rep. • 20-2-1 (14 KOs)
- 5 **JULIAN WILLIAMS**
  U.S. • 27-2-1 (16 KOs)
- 6 **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- 7 **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **MICHEL SORO**
  France • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- 9 **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 10 **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 16-0-1 (11 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
- 3 **MANNY PACQUIAO**
  Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- 4 **KEITH THURMAN**
  U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- 5 **SHAWN PORTER**
  U.S. • 31-3-1 (17 KOs)
- 6 **YORDENIS UGAS** WBA
  Cuba • 26-4-0 (12 KOs)
- 7 **DANNY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
- 8 **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV**
  Uzbekistan • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 9 **SERGEY LIPINETS**
  Russia • 16-1-1 (12 KOs)
- 10 **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 17-0-0 (17 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- C **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA
  U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 1 **JOSE RAMIREZ** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 2 **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 25-1-0 (21 KOs)
- 3 **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 33-2-0 (26 KOs)
- 4 **VIKTOR POSTOL**
  Ukraine • 31-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 5 **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 6 **IVAN BARANCHYK**
  Russia • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 7 **MARIO BARRIOS**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 8 **BATYRZHAN JUKEMBAYEV**
  Kazakhstan • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 9 **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 10 **ROBERT EASTER JR.**
  U.S. • 23-1-1 (14 KOs)

Lawrence Okolie (left) remained unbeaten and moved up to No. 3 in the cruiserweight ratings with a six-round win over Krzystof Glowacki, who dropped to No. 8.

Artur Beterbiev (left) retained his No. 1 position at 175 pounds with a routine win over mandatory challenger Adam Deines.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- C **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBA, WBO, IBF
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 1 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 14-2-0 (10 KOs)
- 2 **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 3 **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)
- 4 **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 30-3-0 (27 KOs)
- 5 **LUKE CAMPBELL**
  U.K. • 20-4-0 (16 KOs)
- 6 **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 36-2-1 (25 KOs)
- 7 **JORGE LINARES**
  Venezuela • 47-5-0 (29 KOs)
- 8 **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
  Australia • 19-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 9 **MASAYOSHI NAKATANI**
  Japan • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 10 **ISAAC CRUZ**
  Mexico • 21-1-1 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA
  U.S. • 24-0-0 (23 KOs)
- 2 **OSCAR VALDEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 29-0-0 (23 KOs)
- 3 **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  U.S. • 31-1-1 (15 KOs)
- 4 **MIGUEL BERCHELT**
  Mexico • 37-2-0 (33 KOs)
- 5 **JAMEL HERRING** WBO
  U.S. • 22-2-0 (10 KOs)
- 6 **TEVIN FARMER**
  U.S. • 30-5-1 (6 KOs)
- 7 **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 15-0-1 (12 KOs)
- 8 **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 9 **CHRIS COLBERT**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)
- 10 **ROGER GUTIERREZ**
  Venezuela • 25-3-1 (20 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **GARY RUSSELL JR.** WBC
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 2 **XU CAN**
  China • 18-2-0 (3 KOs)
- 3 **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 27-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 4 **MAURICIO LARA**
  Mexico • 22-2-0 (15 KOs)
- 5 **JOSH WARRINGTON**
  U.K. • 30-1-0 (7 KOs)
- 6 **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 32-1-0 (27 KOs)
- 7 **MARK MAGSAYO**
  Phil. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 8 **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
  Mongolia • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 9 **JESSIE MAGDALENO**
  U.S. • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 10 **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- C (VACANT)
- 1 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- 2 **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 28-3-1 (10 KOs)
- 3 **STEPHEN FULTON** WBO
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 4 **RYOSUKE IWASA**
  Japan • 27-3-0 (17 KOs)
- 5 **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
  U.S. • 21-0-1 (16 KOs)
- 6 **ANGELO LEO**
  U.S. • 20-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 7 **HIROAKI TESHIGAWARA**
  Japan • 22-2-2 (15 KOs)
- 8 **RAEESE ALEEM**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 9 **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 19-3-0 (16 KOs)
- 10 **RONNY RIOS**
  U.S. • 33-3-0 (16 KOs)

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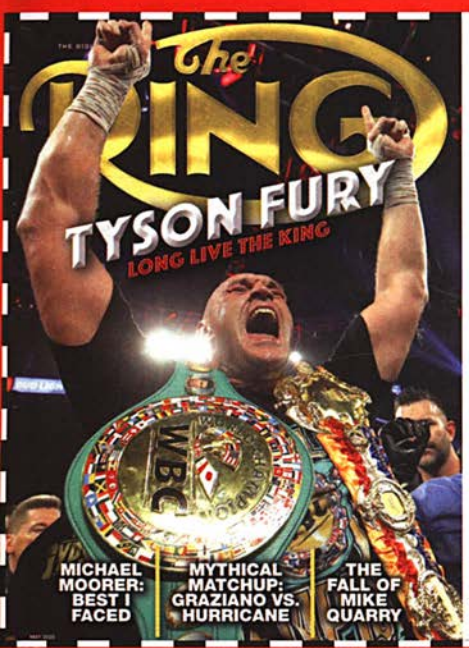

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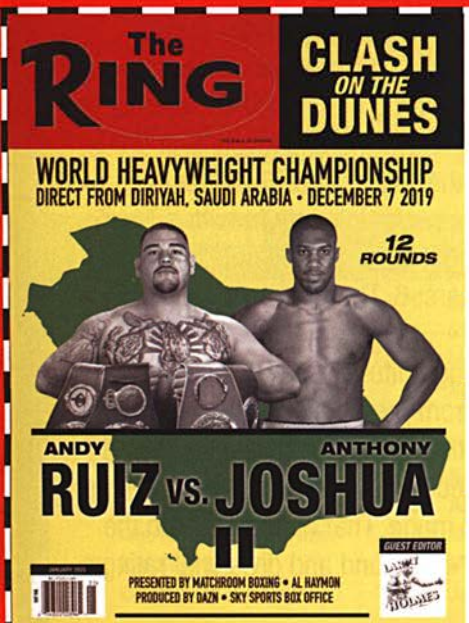

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RATINGS

Through fights of March 27, 2021

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
  Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE**
  Phil. • 40-6-0 (26 KOs)
- **2** **NORDINE OUBAALI** WBC
  France • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
  Philippines • 30-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **4** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 19-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ZOLANI TETE**
  S. Africa • 28-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **TAKUMA INOUE**
  Japan • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **7** **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 21-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **8** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
  Cuba • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **9** **MIKE PLANIA**
  Philippines • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

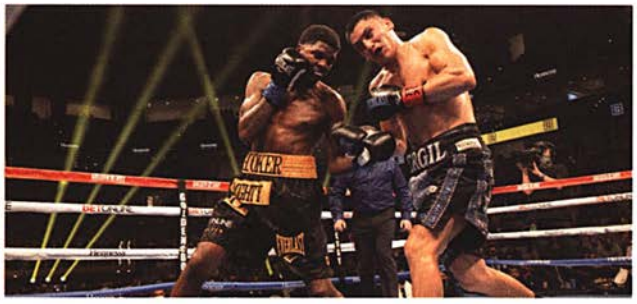
- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING,WBA,WBC
  Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 50-5-1 (43 KOs)
- **2** **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
  Nicaragua • 50-3-0 (41 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
  Phil. • 32-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **5** **KHALID YAFAI**
  U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 17-1-2 (8 KOs)
- **7** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 34-4-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **9** **JEYVIER CINTRON**
  Puerto Rico • 11-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **10** **CARLOS CUADRAS**
  Mexico • 39-4-1 (27 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

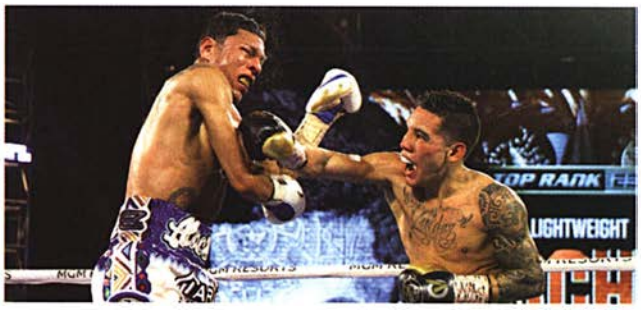
- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MORUTI MTHALANE** IBF
  S. Africa • 39-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **2** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **3** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
  Japan • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **MASAYUKI KURODA**
  Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **6** **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 31-5-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **JAY HARRIS**
  U.K. • 18-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **ANGEL ACOSTA**
  Puerto Rico • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **9** **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
  Puerto Rico • 21-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **JOSELITO VELAZQUEZ**
  Mexico • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC
  Japan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
  Nicaragua • 36-2-0 (31 KOs)
- **3** **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **4** **CARLOS CANIZALES**
  Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **ELWIN SOTO** WBO
  Mexico • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **6** **TETSUYA HISADA**
  Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)
- **7** **EDWARD HENO**
  Phil. • 14-1-5 (5 KOs)
- **8** **SHO KIMURA**
  Japan • 19-3-2 (12 KOs)
- **9** **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
  Argentina • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
  U.S. • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)



Vergil Ortiz Jr. (right) made his debut at No. 10 in the welterweight ratings after stopping Maurice Hooker.



Oscar Valdez (right) entered the 130-pound ratings all the way at No. 2 after knocking out Miguel Berchelt, who was No. 1.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 21-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
  Thailand • 36-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
  Thailand • 54-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **5** **BYRON ROJAS**
  Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **6** **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 21-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **7** **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
  Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **8** **SIMPIWE KONKCO**
  S. Africa • 19-6-0 (7 KOs)
- **9** **RENE MARK CUARTO** IBF
  Phil. • 19-2-2 (11 KOs)
- **10** **PEDRO TADURAN**
  Phil. • 14-3-1 (11 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of March 27, 2021

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
U.K. • 17-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 40-1-1 (30 KOs)

4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 10-2-0 (3 KOs)

5 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)

6 **YESICA BOPP**
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)

7 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)

8 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
Argentina • 29-4-3 (10 KOs)

9 **MARCELA ACUNA**
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)

10 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS** IBF, WBA
Sweden • 8-0-0 (4 KOs)
2 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **ALICIA NAPOLEON ESPINOSA**
U.S. • 12-2-0 (7 KOs)
4 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)
5 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHT
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
2 **TORI NELSON**
U.S. • 20-2-3 (4 KOs)
3 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **TAYLA HARRIS**
Australia • 7-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** WBC, WBO, IBF
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE**
Canada • 17-1-0 (0 KOs)
2 **HANNA GABRIELS** WBA
Costa Rica • 20-2-1 (11 KOs)
3 **MIKAELA LAUREN**
Sweden • 32-6-0 (13 KOs)
4 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-6-0 (8 KOs)
5 **PATRICIA BERGHULT**
Sweden • 14-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **JESSICA MCCASKILL** IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-2-0 (3 KOs)
1 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)
2 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 44-13-5 (11 KOs)
3 **ORNELLA DOMINI**
Switzerland • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
4 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 20-6-0 (0 KOs)
5 **LOLITA MUZEYA**
Zambia • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHRISTINA LINARDATOU** WBO
Greece • 13-2-0 (6 KOs)
2 **MARY MCGEE** IBF
U.S. • 27-3-0 (15 KOs)
3 **CHANTELLE CAMERON** WBC
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 26-4-0 (10 KOs)
5 **KALI REIS** WBA
U.S. • 17-7-1 (5 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.K. • 17-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)
2 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 9-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 13-1-0 (5 KOs)
5 **NICOLE WESNER**
Germany • 16-0-0 (7 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **TERRI HARPER** WBC
U.K. • 11-0-1 (6 KOs)
2 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE** IBF
France • 22-1-0 (18 KOs)
3 **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 18-0-1 (4 KOs)
5 **EWA BRODNICKA**
Poland • 20-1-0 (2 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBO
Puerto Rico • 40-1-1 (30 KOs)
2 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH** WBA, WBC
Canada • 41-10-2 (19 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **HEATHER HARDY**
U.S. • 22-1-0 (4 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN** IBF
U.S. • 18-3-1 (1 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 37-4-4 (16 KOs)
2 **MARCELA ACUNA** IBF
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)
3 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 29-4-3 (10 KOs)
4 **MAYERLIN RIVAS** WBA
Venezuela • 16-4-2 (10 KOs)
5 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 52-3-2 (30 KOs)
2 **DEBORA DIONICIUS**
Argentina • 30-2-0 (6 KOs)
3 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 20-3-1 (3 KOs)
4 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 54-10-4 (18 KOs)
5 **MARIA CECILIA ROMAN** IBF
Argentina • 15-5-1 (0 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 31-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 20-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 30-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 23-3-0 (4 KOs)
5 **ESMERALDA MORENO**
Mexico • 35-12-2 (11 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA** WBA
Japan • 18-2-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 29-3-2 (10 KOs)
3 **AVA KNIGHT**
U.S. • 19-2-5 (5 KOs)
4 **MARLEN ESPARZA**
U.S. • 9-1-0 (1 KOs)
5 **IBETH ZAMORA** WBC
Mexico • 32-6-0 (12 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

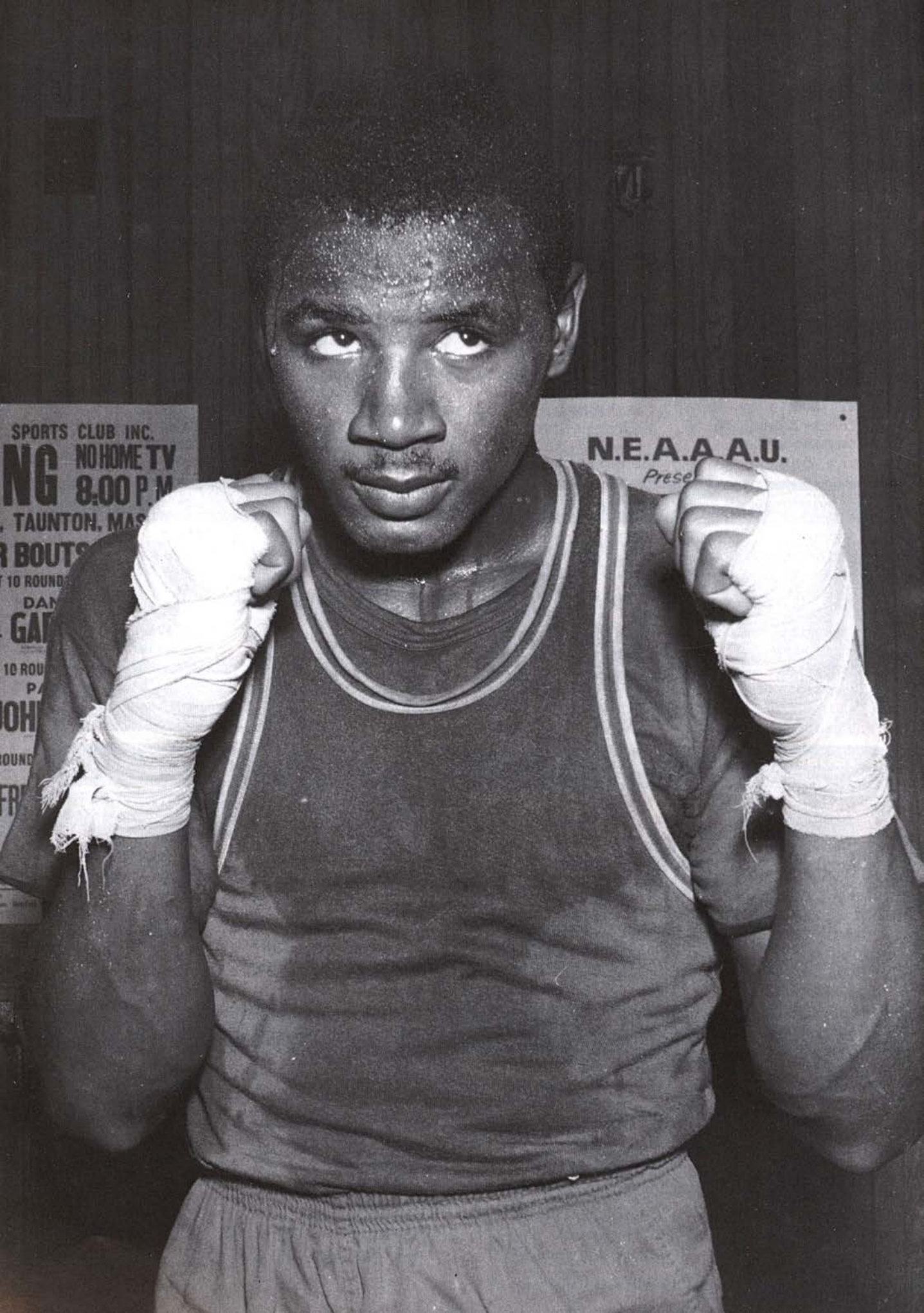
C **(VACANT)**
1 **YESICA BOPP** WBA
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)
2 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)
3 **TSUNAMI TENKAI** WBO
Japan • 27-12-1 (16 KOs)
4 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 13-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **KIM CLAVEL**
Canada • 13-0-0 (2 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBA
Mexico • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)
1 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 10-0-1 (3 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 21-2-0 (9 KOs)
2 **ANABEL ORTIZ**
Mexico • 31-4-0 (4 KOs)
4 **ETSUKO TADA**
Japan • 20-3-3 (7 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 15-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 17-0-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MIKA IWAKAWA** WBO
Japan • 10-5-1 (3 KOs)
4 **NAO IKEYAMA**
Japan • 18-6-4 (5 KOs)
5 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 4-0-1 (1 KO)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THE EARLY YEARS

HAGLER'S ARDUOUS RISE THROUGH THE AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL RANKS WAS PRECEDED BY A CHANGE OF SCENERY AND A FORTUITOUS UNION WITH THE PETRONELLI BROTHERS

By **Bernard Fernandez**

Serendipity is where chance becomes good fortune.

Some words, of course, have different meanings or interpretations. Was it "serendipitous" that 15-year-old Marvin Nathaniel Hagler and his family relocated from the abject poverty and violence of his old neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey, to the comparative safety of Brockton, Massachusetts? Or that the introverted Black youth who preferred the company of pigeons to most humans found a pair of caring white mentors in brothers Goody and Pat Petronelli, who introduced him to boxing and thus put him on the path to ring immortality?

Given the purview of historical context, the short answer to both questions would have to be yes. But to remember Hagler, who was 66 when he died unexpectedly on March 13 of this year in Bartlett, New Hampshire, solely as a shaven-skulled wrecking machine inside the ropes is to deny him his due as a fascinatingly complex individual shaped by myriad influences. Winston Churchill once described Russia as a "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma," which is as apt a description as any of the multifaceted Marvelous Marvin Hagler, who had his name legally changed in 1982. When fight night arrived, the same gracious and affable guy who loved coming back to the International Boxing Hall of Fame (into which he was inducted in 1993) to chat up fans, sign autographs and pose for pictures could readily summon a more threatening side of himself. He called it "the Monster coming out," and it was a voracious beast that struck fear into many opponents as Hagler battered his way to a 62-3-2 professional record with 52 knockout victories.

Before one of his 12 successful title defenses, against Fulgencio Obelmejias, Hagler – whose self-applied motto was "Destruct and Destroy" – vowed to do to the Venezuelan what he had already done to a host of other victims, and would continue to do as long as the Monster could be periodically freed to do what it did best. "I'm going to kill him," predicted Hagler prior to their 1982 rematch, his inner well of meanness again swelling during another training camp that entailed as much mental preparation as physical. "They can't stop me. I'll kill them all!" Not surprisingly, Obelmejias, his face badly swollen, went down and was counted out in the fifth round.

The more foreboding side of Hagler was described thusly by journalist Brian Doogan, a former contributor to The Ring, in his book about Hagler's showdown with Sugar Ray Leonard, *The SuperFight*: "He was a tremendously skilled, technical boxer and he worked prolifically on those skills in order to perfect his dark art, but he also had an almost barbaric dimension, a place he could go to that was beyond most people's imaginings."

Who and what any of us are is a combination of nature and nurture.

"I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE SOMEBODY." - MARVELOUS MARVIN HAGLER

Hungry and ambitious, the young Hagler dreamed of emulating boxing idols such as Floyd Patterson and Emile Griffith.

In young Marvin's case, the primary nurturer was his mother, Ida Mae Hagler, who did the best she could for her children: In addition to Marvin, her eldest, there were four daughters and another son, Robbie Sims Jr., who eventually became a middleweight contender himself. Marvin's father, Robert Sims Sr., abandoned the family when the children were young. But Ida Mae's unwavering devotion counted for only so much when it came time to pay the bills, which obligated her and the kids to remain in the almost exclusively Black Central Ward ghetto in Newark, where the rents were low, the walls thin and the crime rate high.

Mentally sharp but socially awkward, Marvin spent a lot of solitary time on the roof of the rundown tenement building in which the family resided, where the future champ, as later would be the case with Mike Tyson in Brooklyn, kept a pigeon coop. It was mostly there that Marvin dared to imagine himself doing great things in the competitive arena.

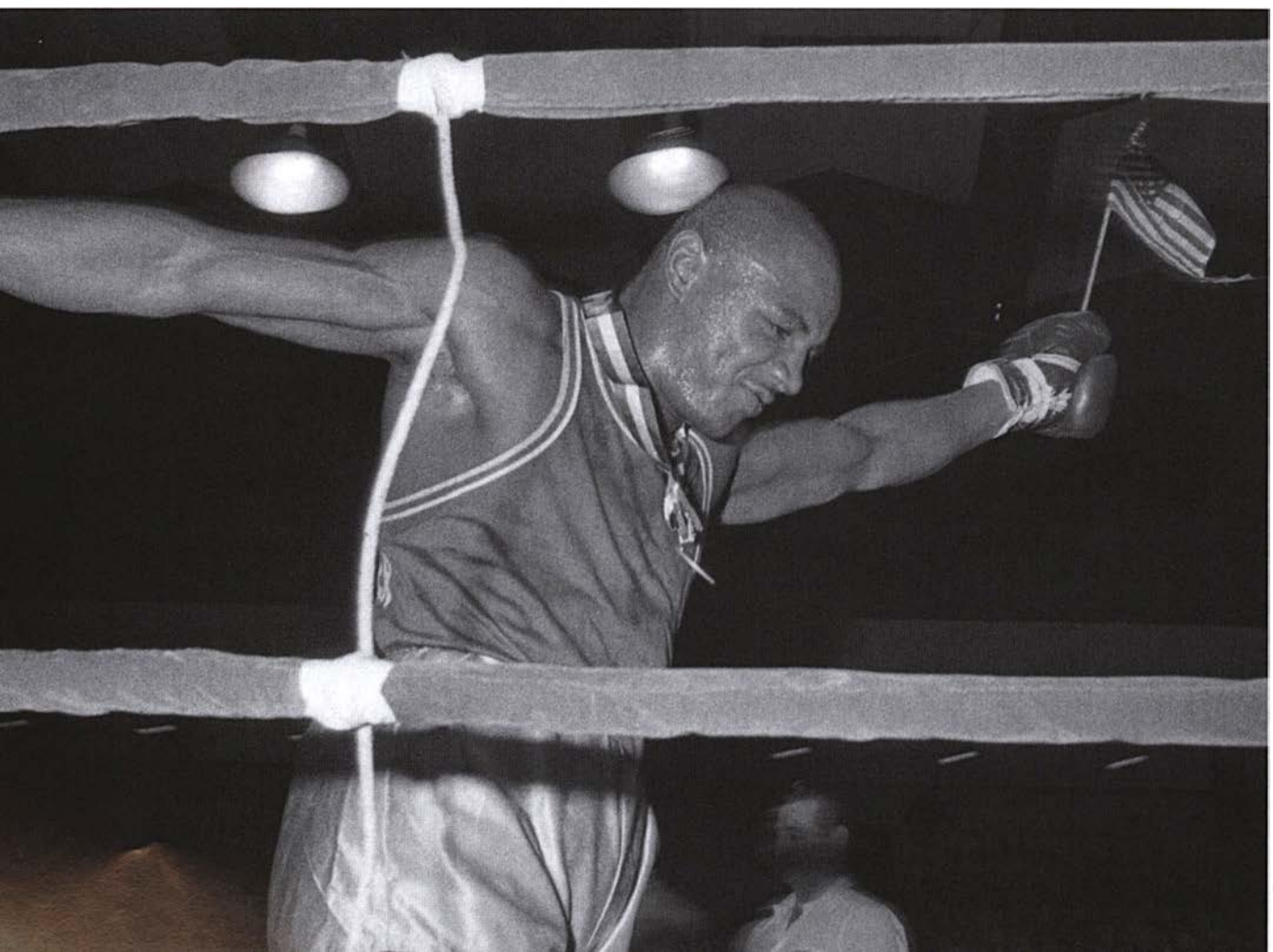
"I always wanted to be somebody," Hagler told Sports Illustrated writer William Nack for a lengthy profile that appeared in the magazine's October 18, 1982, issue. "Baseball, I played like I was Mickey Mantle or Willie Mays; basketball, I'd be Walt Frazier or Kareem; boxing, I'd pretend I was Floyd Patterson or Emile Griffith."

Perhaps, in a different setting that had more green spaces, the athletically inclined Marvin Hagler might have been able to make a run at becoming an ersatz Mays. At his fully grown adult height of 5-foot-9½, becoming a faux replica of Walt Frazier was unlikely, and stepping into the oversized sneakers of the 7-foot-2 Abdul-Jabbar was simply crazy. But if there really is such a thing as serendipity, be it in Newark or Brockton, there was at least a chance Marvin might have found a way to actually live his dream in boxing, the quintessential urban escape route for hungry kids handy with their fists.

"He always said he wanted to be a boxer," Ida Mae told Nack of her son's athletic ambition that had shorter odds of reaching fruition than the ones he had envisioned on the diamond or on the court. "I didn't believe him when he said he wanted to be like Floyd Patterson. I thought he'd become a social worker."

The family's worsening finances curtailed any academic goals Marvin might have harbored, and, as a 14-year-old high school freshman, he dropped out to take a minimum-wage job in a toy factory. His quitting school, however, came a year after the five-day race riot that began on July 12, 1967, and got worse when a Black woman was shot and killed by a Newark police officer on July 15. By the time order was finally

An 18-year-old Hagler defeated Terry Dobbs to win the 165-pound National AAU championship.



From left to right: Tony Lopes, Tommy Rose, Hagler, Ricky Wynn, Danny Tratzinski and Dick Ecklund.

restored in the smoldering remains of the Central Ward section, 26 people (one cop, one firefighter and 24 residents) were dead, 700-plus injured and almost 1,500 arrested. The cost in property damage, $11 million, might not seem like much now, but that equates to more than $86 million in today's dollars.

Aware that a bullet need not be directed at a specific target to snuff out a life, Ida Mae directed her brood to prostrate themselves on the floor for almost the entire duration of the conflagration going on three stories below. Despite such precautions, two slugs smashed through a bedroom window and shattered the plaster above the bed of Marvin's sister Veronica.

In 1969, another Newark riot, albeit one that lasted only two days and did not result in any deaths, convinced Marvin's mother that remaining in Central Ward put her and her kids at more risk than she was willing to accept. Ida Mae called a relative in Brockton, once renowned for its shoe factories and later as the hometown of heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano, and asked her to help find a more suitable place to which the family could relocate.

Brockton proved to be a "relief" and "wonderful," in Ida Mae's estimation, primarily because of the reduction in the sound of gunfire and police sirens at night. But for Marvin, who was accustomed to being in a virtually all-Black environment, the transition into an ethnically diverse, blue-collar community of native New Englanders, French Canadians, Lithuanians, Italians and Irish, with a smattering of African Americans and Puerto Ricans, proved somewhat daunting.

"I felt out of place, going from an all-Black society to a mixed society," he told Nack. "The only place I'd run across whites was in stores. They were always behind the counters, taking the cash. School principals. Police. The post office. I really didn't trust them. If they were nice, I thought, 'What do they want from me?' I had to learn for myself how people really were. When I found out all white people weren't bad, I started to relax around them. It took me a long time. Goody and Pat had a lot to do with that."

Goody (actual name: Guareno)

"I FELT OUT OF PLACE, GOING FROM AN ALL-BLACK SOCIETY TO A MIXED SOCIETY. ... I HAD TO LEARN FOR MYSELF HOW PEOPLE REALLY WERE."

BOSTON GLOBE

and Pat (actual name: Pasquale) were partners in a Brockton construction company, and they also ran a boxing gym. Goody, a friend of the revered Marciano, had only recently retired from the U.S. Navy, where he served 20 years in the medical corps and had been a boxing instructor. Had Marciano not perished in the crash of a small private plane in an Iowa cornfield on August 31, 1969, the day before his 47th birthday, his intention was to join brothers Petronelli as a partner in the Brockton gym.

It was in that no-frills gym that Marvin Hagler, just 15 and the loser of a street fight the night before, was to glimpse his eventual destiny with the aid of two men who he came to trust almost as surrogate fathers.

"I like to box. I fell in love with all of the fancy moves," Hagler said of the gym rats hitting the speed bag, of the thuds they made by pounding the heavy bag, of all the permutations of what boxing aficionados have so long referred to as the sweet science. While curious experimenters sporadically showed up at the gym, more than a few drifted away once they discovered the commitment of time and effort required to become reasonably proficient, not to mention the necessity of developing a high tolerance for pain. Hagler, though, was immediately smitten.

"He had that desire," said Goody, who was 88 when he died on January 29, 2012. "He'd get a little swollen lip or a black eye and he'd come back the next day. Those are the kids you look for. But you don't promise 'em nothin'."

Well, it's best not to promise the unlikely. But Hagler delivered, as did the Petronellis, who quickly sensed that they had a prodigy with the heart, mind, will and power to develop into something special. Marvin was either 55-1 or 50-2 as an amateur, depending on which figure one chooses to believe, and he was the National AAU champion in the 165-pound weight class in 1973, dominating and then stopping Terry Dobbs in the final.

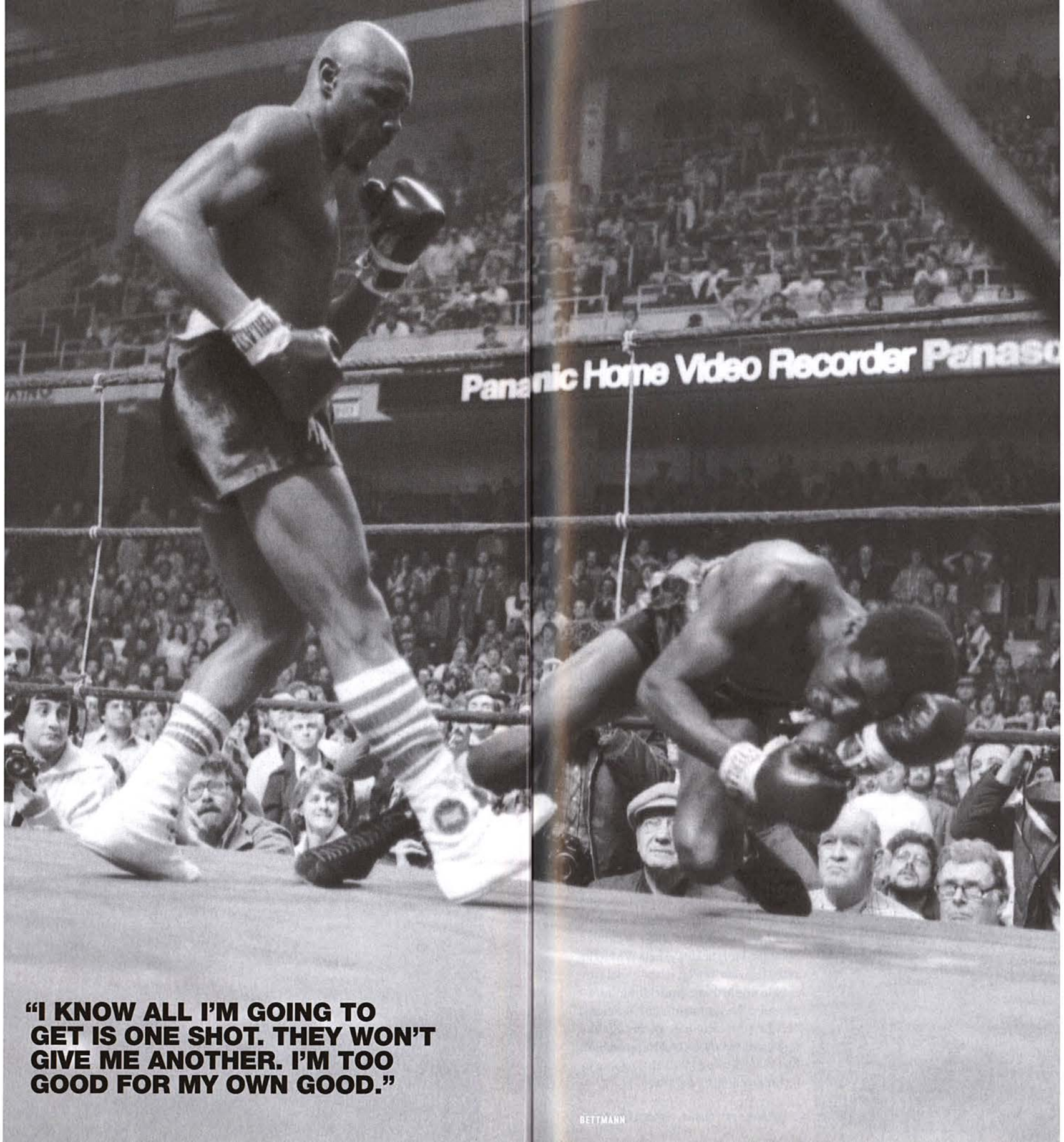
With the 1972 Munich Olympics already past and the 1976 Montreal Olympics more than three years away, Hagler elected to turn pro shortly after his conquest of Dobbs. His first punch-for-pay outing, for which he reportedly received an insulting pittance of $50, came in the Brockton High School gym against Terry Ryan, whom he knocked out in the second round of a scheduled four-rounder.

Coming up the hard way, slowly and often for meager purses, had the effect of embittering Hagler – a former national amateur champion, after all – when he saw the attention and bigger-bucks opportunities that quickly went to the more celebrated members of the 1976 U.S. Olympic boxing team, particularly future archrival Sugar Ray Leonard.

"Look at all that money those Olympic kids got; look at all the money tennis players get," Hagler told the New York Times prior to his third matchup with Sugar Ray Seales, a gold medalist at the 1972 Olympic Games, against whom he went 2-0-1. "Leon Spinks got a title shot after seven fights. Some guys have fought for the title four times. This is my 45th fight and I still haven't gotten one, and I know all I'm going to get is one. They won't give me another. I'm too good for my own good."

It might be argued that getting too much, too soon can spoil certain fighters, blurring their focus and making them overly comfortable with the perks of success. Marvin Hagler never had that problem; he used every real or perceived slight as another log tossed onto the inner fire that raged inside him like a blast furnace.

By the early 1970s, Hagler was the best middleweight in New England. However, that regional stature did little for his campaign to break through to the next level populated by the 160-pound weight division's true elite. Goody, his trainer, and Pat, his manager, came to the joint



"I KNOW ALL I'M GOING TO GET IS ONE SHOT. THEY WON'T GIVE ME ANOTHER. I'M TOO GOOD FOR MY OWN GOOD."

BETTMANN

In their third bout, Hagler destroyed Olympic champ Sugar Ray Seales in 80 seconds.

decision that Marvin needed a much better grade of opponents to elevate his game. They decided to take him, frequently if necessary, to the great fight town of Philadelphia, which then boasted four of the 10 top-rated middleweights on the planet.

"All those Philadelphia fighters were tough," Goody recalled in 1991. "We fought 'The Iron' down there. I called them 'The Iron' because they were as tough as iron. Whenever we fought one of 'em down there, I'd use the others as sparring partners.

"When we got there, I remember the Spectrum promoter, Russell Peltz, telling me, 'Guys from Boston (or thereabout) can't fight.' But I looked Russell in the eye and said, 'This one can.'"

Hagler's first venture into the crucible of the Spectrum ended in disappointment and disillusionment; the visitor from Brockton, who had come in 25-0-1 with 19 KOs, dropped an extremely dubious 10-round majority decision to Bobby "Boogaloo" Watts, the sort of outcome that might have dissuaded another promising young fighter (Marvin was then 21), or his handlers, from any return engagements. Even Philly's legendarily inhospitable fight fans railed against that obvious injustice.

But return Team Hagler did to the City of Brotherly Love, for more of the sort of on-the-job learning experiences that served the dual purpose of sharpening Marvin's skills and toughening his resolve. After registering a second-round stoppage of Matt Donovan in Boston, Hagler came back to the Spectrum on March 9, 1976, for a risky 10-rounder with wily, world-rated veteran Willie "The Worm" Monroe. This time there was no controversy; Monroe schooled Hagler in coming away with a wide 10-round unanimous decision victory, the only Hagler non-victory throughout his pro career that was beyond reproach.

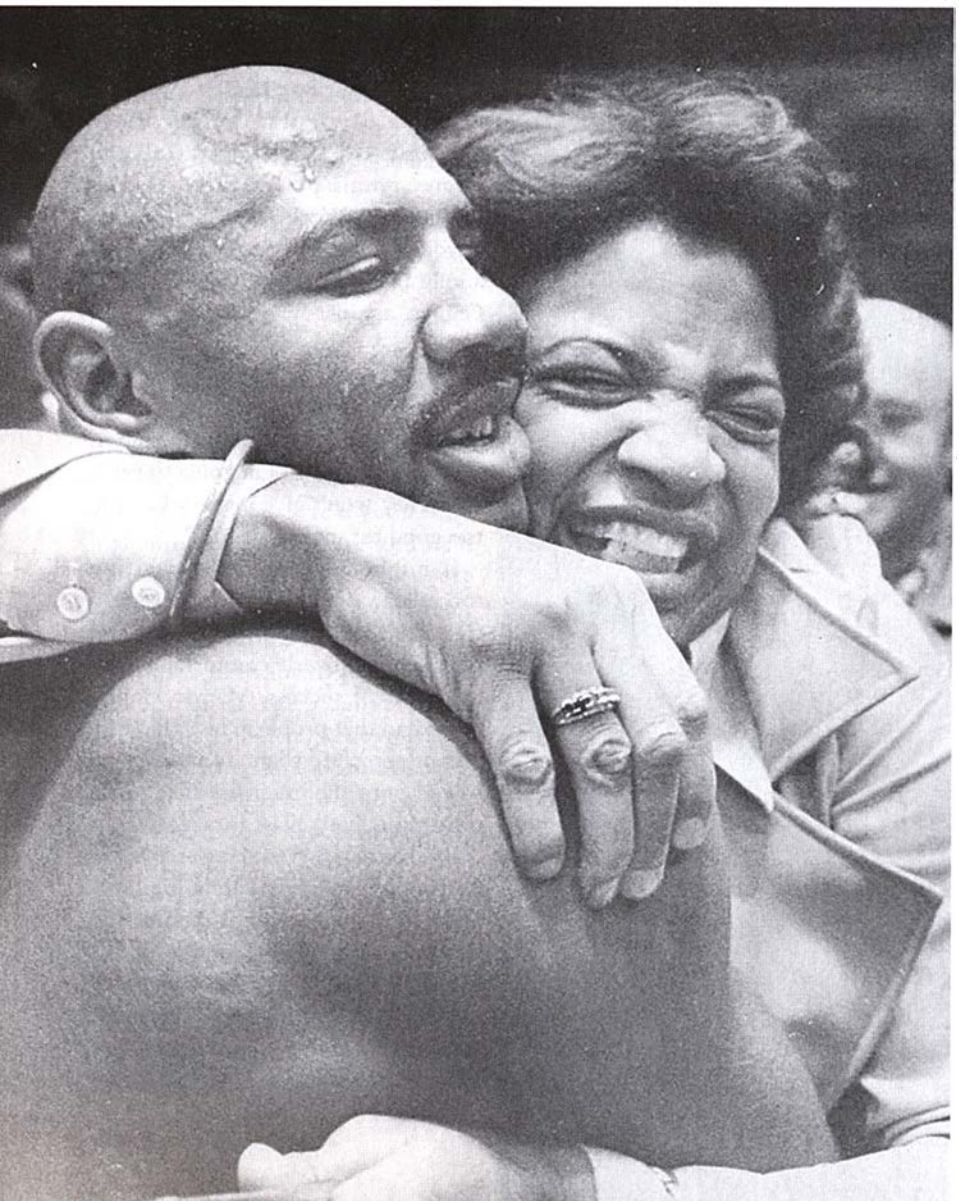
In a fight witnessed by only 3,459 spectators because of a crowd-inhibiting snowstorm that also prevented a television crew from being on-site, which explains why there is no film footage of the not-yet Marvelous One's harshest lesson to that point and maybe ever, he bled from the nose from the fifth round on and both of his eyes were nearly swollen shut by the final bell.

"Marvin thought he was good, but he hadn't fought the caliber of fighters I had," Monroe, who was 73 when he died in 2019, recalled in 1987. "He had never fought a seasoned pro. He beat Watts, but he didn't get the decision. He should have been unbeaten when he fought me.

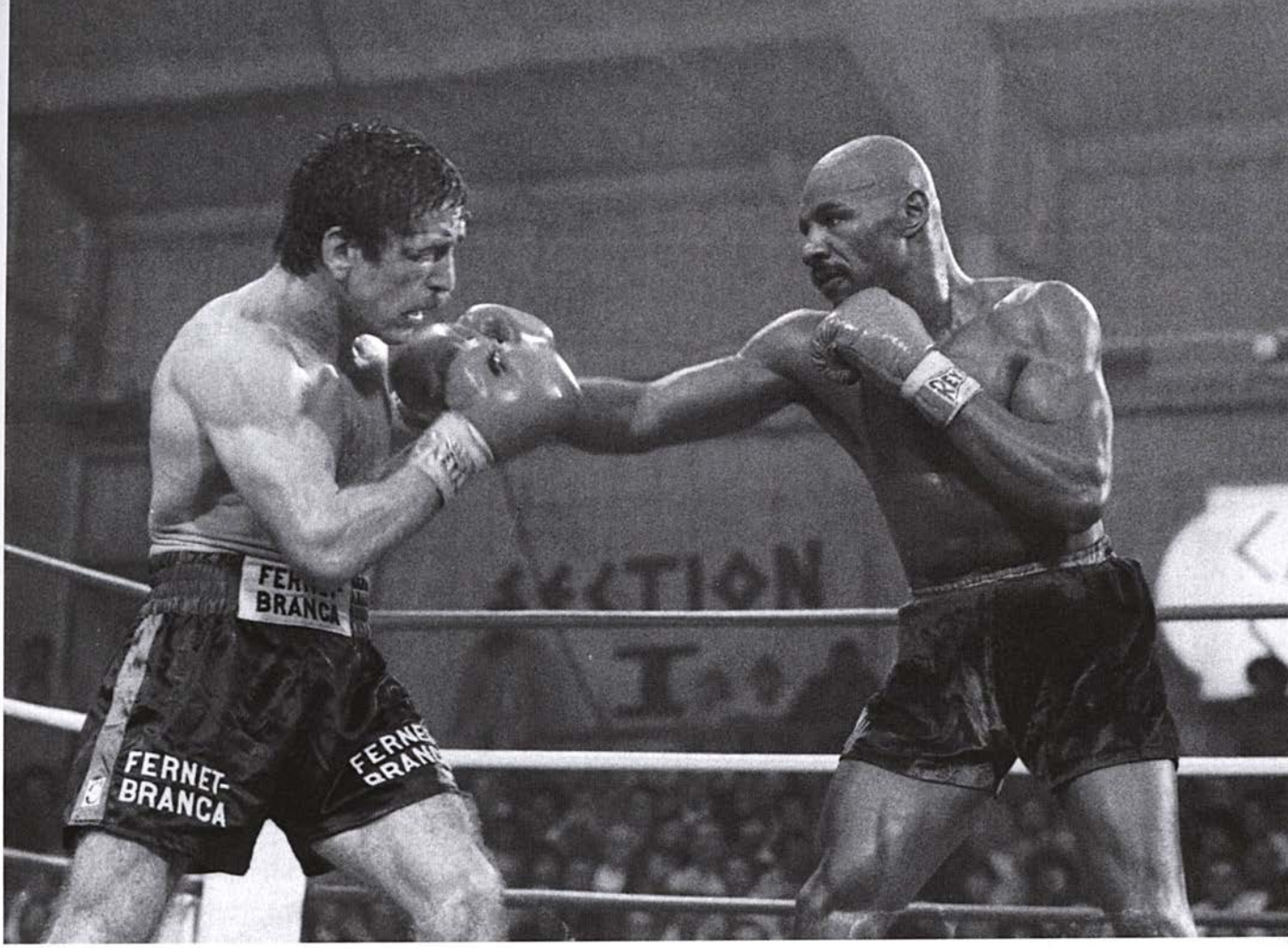
"I was strong, tall, slick and quick. He couldn't figure me out. I hit him with a left jab in the first and his eyes opened wide. I beat him with uppercuts, busted a blood vessel in his nose. He bled a lot. Both his eyes were closed. I couldn't see how he made it through 10 rounds."

Even in defeat, however, Hagler's grittiness impressed Monroe's trainer, former middleweight contender George Benton, who in 2001 was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame for his work with, among others, such greats as Evander Holyfield, Pernell Whitaker and Meldrick Taylor.

"He could have [quit]," the now-deceased Benton said after the fight. "He had opportunities all through the fight and no one would blame him. But he's one tough kid. He is going to be outstanding."



Hagler's mother, Ida Mae, embraces her son following a 1977 KO win over Mike Colbert at the Boston Garden.



Vito Antuofermo held on to his undisputed middleweight championship with a controversial draw that left Hagler embittered.

Peltz, who said he might then have afforded to sign the unaffiliated Hagler to a promotional contract, wasn't so certain as to what the future held for someone who was 0-2 in his Philadelphia appearances.

"You learn as you go, but you never stop making mistakes," a wistful Peltz said of letting Hagler slip through his fingers.

From that tenuous start, however, a rapidly improving Hagler demonstrated that "The Iron" was malleable. He halted Eugene "Cyclone" Hart in eight rounds at the Spectrum in September 1976 and wore down Monroe to a 12th-round TKO in Boston five months later. In August of 1977 and 1978, Hagler stopped Monroe in two (their rubber match) and scored a clear-cut 10-round unanimous decision over Bennie Briscoe, both bouts in the Spectrum. Not only that, but he added a second-round stoppage of Watts in Portland, Maine, in April 1980. That officially made him 5-2 for the gauntlet run against Philly's finest 160-pound practitioners of the pugilistic arts, and in reality 6-1. Fulfillment of his destiny was now enticingly close.

Or was it? As a shot at the middleweight title continued to be a hazy apparition, Hagler considered quitting the Petronellis, who had helped him get by financially in the early days of low-purse ring engagements by employing him at a fair wage to do apprentice-level jobs for the Petronelli Construction Company. However, he opted to remain loyal to those who had been loyal to him, rather than to take off for a career recalibration in California.

"Pat and Goody did something for me that they never realized," Hagler said. "I was grateful to have a trade. They matured me. I found trust in these two people. I kind of knew what I wanted in life."

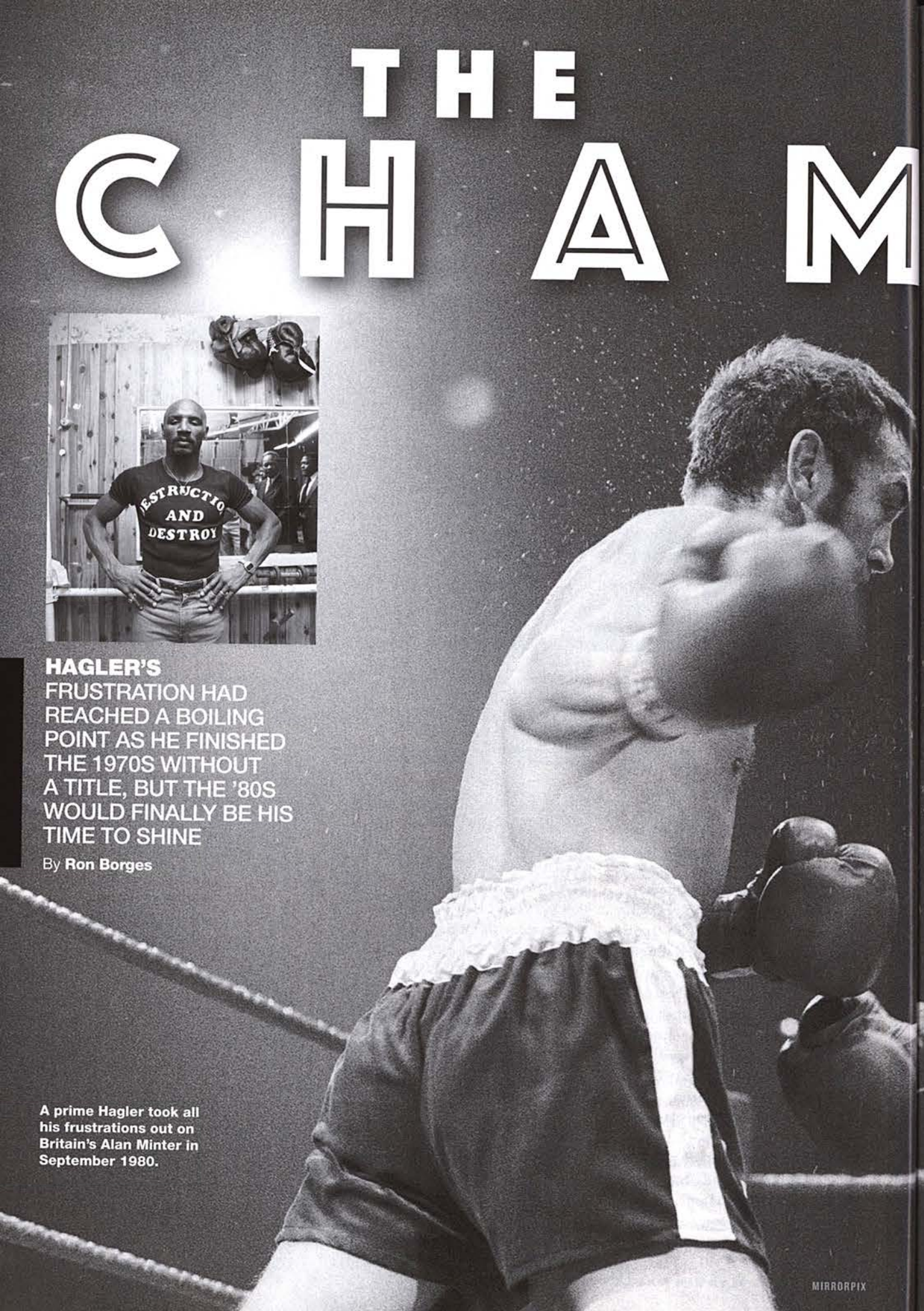
After his last pre-title-shot bout against a member of "The Iron" (Briscoe, on August 24, 1978), Hagler was made to wait for five more fights over 15 months until he finally was granted the chance to demonstrate, as he and an increasing number of riders on his bandwagon believed, that he was the best middleweight in the world. That opportunity – in Hagler's 50th pro outing! – would come on November 30, 1979, against Ring/WBC/WBA champ Vito Antuofermo, who was making the first defense of the titles he had wrested from Argentina's Hugo Corro five months earlier.

The 15-round split draw, enabling Antuofermo to retain his bejeweled belts, to many appeared to be another miscarriage of justice. A miffed Hagler would have to wait a while longer to sit upon the throne he believed already should have been his. But once coronated, his reign would be long and glorious.

THE CHAMPION

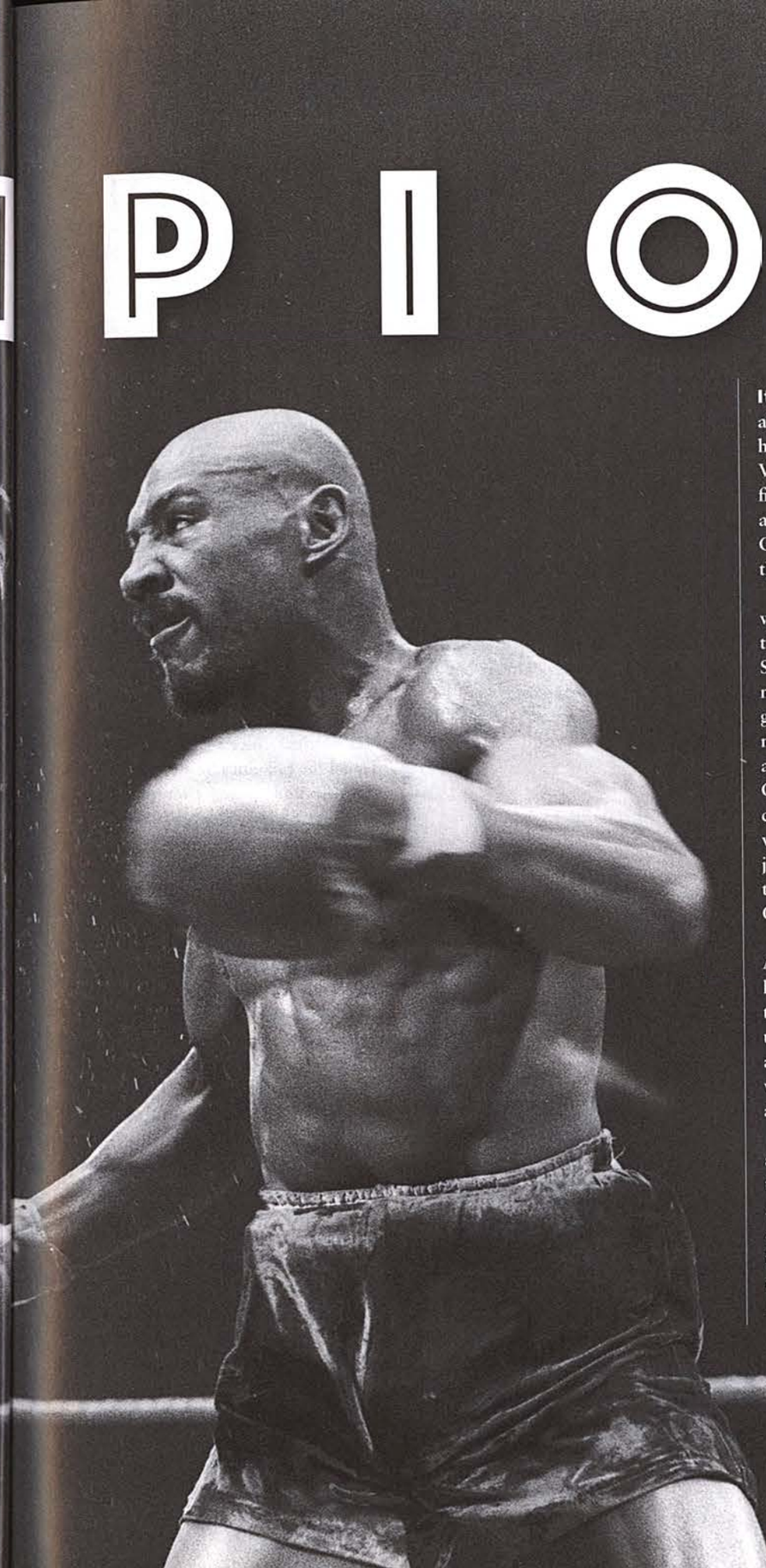
HAGLER'S FRUSTRATION HAD REACHED A BOILING POINT AS HE FINISHED THE 1970S WITHOUT A TITLE, BUT THE '80S WOULD FINALLY BE HIS TIME TO SHINE

By **Ron Borges**



A prime Hagler took all his frustrations out on Britain's Alan Minter in September 1980.

MIRRORPIX



It was less than three months after he'd had his pockets picked and his dreams stolen from him in Las Vegas that Marvin Hagler began his final trek toward becoming what he'd always known he was – marvelous. One could not have faulted him if at that moment he had his doubts.

After 49 professional fights in which more were contested in the gymnasium at Brockton High School than were staged in boxing's major venues, Hagler had finally gotten his long overdue shot at the middleweight title. It had come only after the Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill, threatened the sport with a congressional investigation if Hagler was not given his just due, but the justice only lasted until they rang the bell at the Sports Pavilion at Caesars Palace.

Less than an hour later, Vito Antuofermo, a man with six cuts on his face that would take 25 stitches to close, was awarded a draw so unsightly that 10 Italian journalists at ringside not known for impartiality when it came to one of their own even agreed Hagler was a clear winner.

"If the judges knew anything about boxing, they would have felt the same way," Hagler said after Antuofermo retained the Ring, WBC and WBA titles. Once again, the inequities of a cruel sport had been rubbed in his face.

Three months later, Hagler stood

under dim lights at the Cumberland County Civic Arena in Portland, Maine. Portland is no Vegas, yet there he was, back at the bottom, but not staying there long after bombing out a sacrificial lamb named Loucif Hamani in two rounds.

In another three months, he would return to Maine to flatten Bobby "Boogaloo" Watts in two rounds. Watts had been given a hometown majority decision over Hagler in Philadelphia four years earlier, and this night he suffered for it. Hagler was coming back and didn't want to waste time doing it.

One more win and he again found himself fighting for the middleweight title, but not against Antuofermo as he had hoped. Antuofermo had been twice beaten by England's Alan Minter, and now Minter was forced to face Hagler at Wembley Arena in London on September 27, 1980. If Minter had left it at that, things might have gone easier on him, but champions can be a cocky lot.

"I am not letting any Black man take the title from me," Minter said a few weeks before the fight, tinging the event with naked racism that would spill over on fight night.

Minter later amended his comments, claiming he'd said "that Black man," as if that somehow made things tidier. Regardless, the crowd at Wembley was a surly lot, led by members of the racist National Front, who hurled bigoted invectives at Hagler on his way into the ring. That didn't help Minter, who was cut to ribbons from the opening bell until the fight was stopped at 1:45 of the third round with the now-dethroned champion barely recognizable behind a mask of blood. Minter had four terrible cuts, two around each eye, and would need nearly 20 stitches to close them, which explained why he had no quarrel with the stoppage.

When Hagler realized he'd finally won the title he'd chased for seven years and 53 fights, he fell to his knees in the center of the ring. As he did, someone threw a half-filled beer bottle at him, beginning a fusillade of missiles that rained down upon Hagler. Hagler's loyal lieges, the Petronelli brothers, who had trained and managed him since he was a teenager, formed a human shield around him, placed a bucket over his head and fled the ring. They hurried toward a tunnel under a balcony and then to the police security headquarters rather than their locker room.

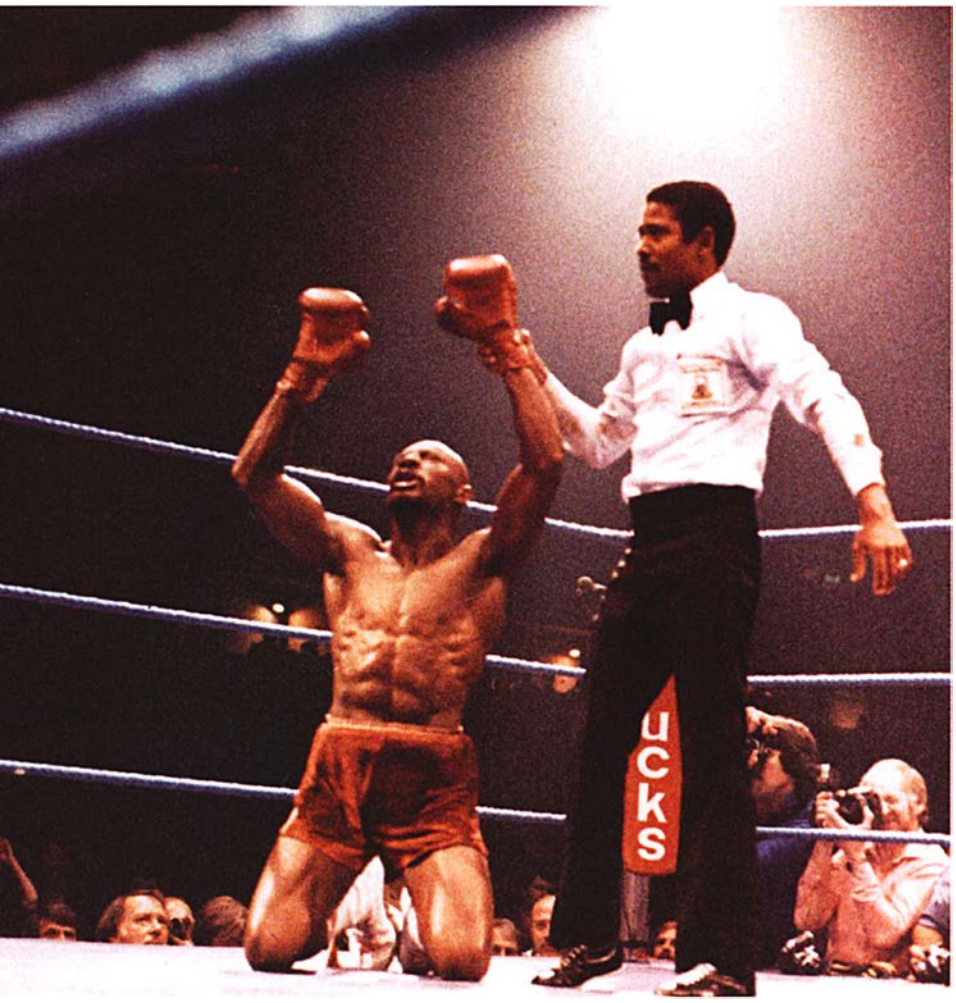
Asked what he thought of Minter's decision to attack Hagler wildly at the onset of the fight, trainer Goody Petronelli snorted, "Coming after Marvin? A damn fool."

When Hagler returned home to Brockton, Massachusetts, he came without the things he had so long pursued, because who gets to savor victory when you're being pelted with beer bottles? Once again he had been denied the full glory he'd earned. He'd won the undisputed championship, but no one handed him the belts.

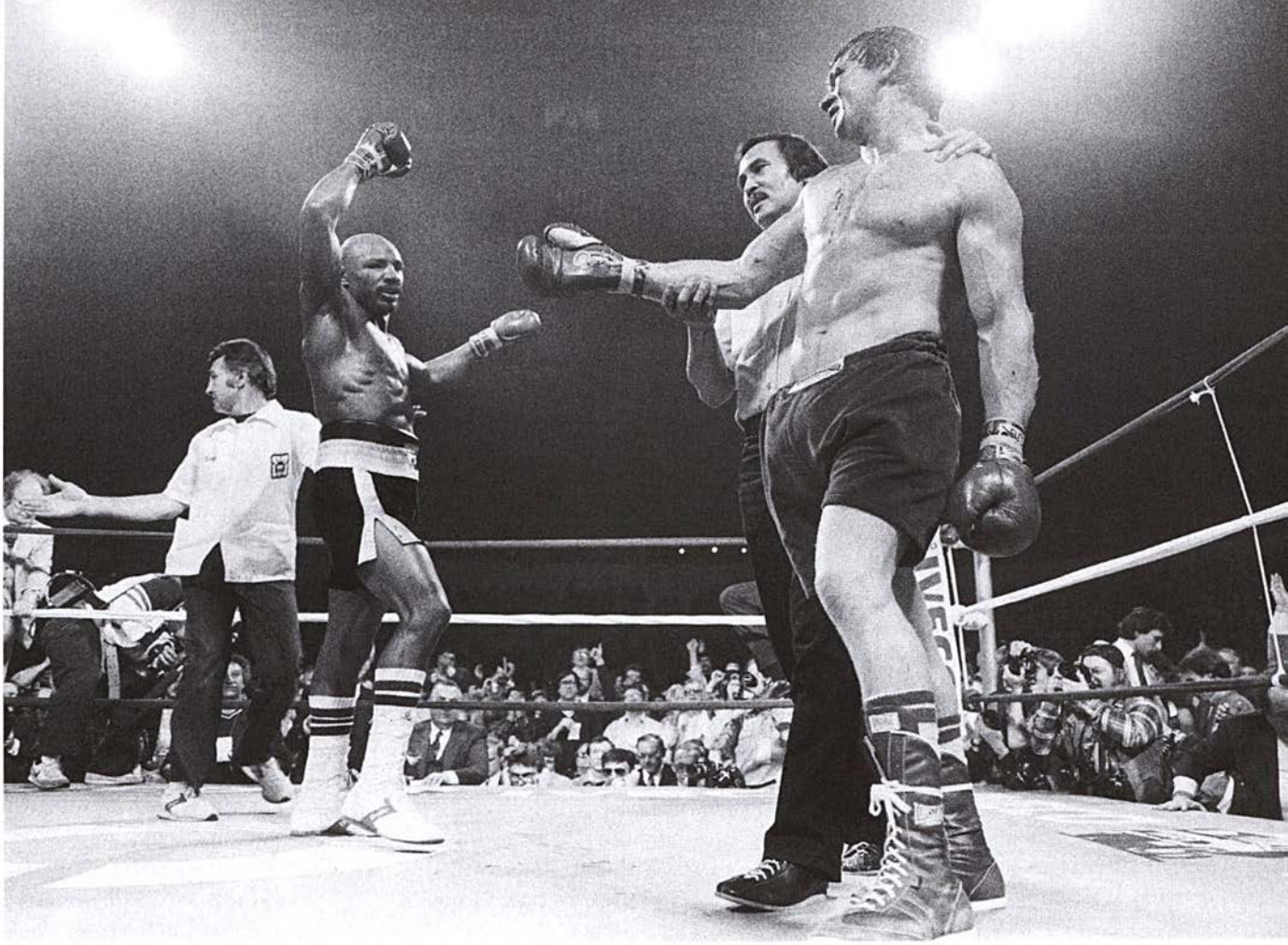
Four months later, he would make the first of his 12 successful title defenses back home at the Boston Garden against Fulgencio Obelmejias. The Venezuelan was 30-0 with 27 knockouts and the universally recognized No. 1 contender, but his resume couldn't save him from a vicious, one-sided beating. Hagler dropped him in the sixth round with a brutal right to the body and following left uppercut, and then staggered him near the end of Round 7.

When Obelmejias came out for the eighth, he looked like a man heading to the gallows. Referee Octavio Meyran agreed, stopping the fight 20 seconds later after Hagler again rattled Obelmejias' head.

"I didn't know what was keeping him up," Hagler said. Poor judgment seemed a likely cause.



Hagler's moment of glory was short-lived as hostile fans reacted furiously to the Minter triumph.



Britain's Tony Sibson had no success against a rampaging Hagler in February 1983.

Hagler was back at Boston Garden again in June after having offered Antuofermo a rematch that proved unwise for the Italian to accept. Like their first encounter, the rematch was a bloody one, with Antuofermo doing all the bleeding. Hagler inadvertently sliced him open 30 seconds into the fight when they clashed heads, and Antuofermo's wise cornerman, Freddie Brown, bought himself three minutes of time to work on the cut by launching into a lengthy argument with the referee claiming the fight should be stopped and called a technical draw. His appeal was denied, and when the second round finally started, Hagler came out and let loose with a five-punch combination, all of which struck Antuofermo in the face. It was clear where this was headed.

By the end of Round 4, Antuofermo was half-blind and his manager, Tony Carione, told referee Davey Pearl he'd had enough even if his fighter had not. Hagler's reaction to accusations that he'd inflicted as much damage with his head as his hands was without mercy.

"I don't care how I did it," he said. "That's the game of boxing." Some game.

In his next defense, Hagler cut up Mustafa Hamsho so badly before the fight was stopped at 2:09 of the 11th round that when it was over, the champion mused, "I don't know what his corner was waiting for. The meat from his eye was hanging down. But I can't let that bother me. I have to think, 'Better him than me.'"

Hamsho needed 55 stitches to close the gashes around his eyes. He had failed to win a single round. So dominant was Hagler that one of the judges scored four of the rounds 10-8 ... without a knockdown.

ABC did Hagler's next opponent, Caveman Lee, no favors when it refused to introduce Hagler as "Marvelous." According to Hagler's attorney, Steven Wainwright, when he and the Petronellis protested, an ABC executive told them, "If he wants to be called Marvelous Marvin at ABC, tell him to go to court and have his name changed."

Irked by this latest slight, Hagler took it out on Lee, bombing him out in 67 seconds. He then went to court and had his name legally changed to Marvelous Marvin Hagler. He had been marvelous long before that, but now it was official.

With the big money Leonard was making still eluding him, Hagler was forced to agree to fight at 3:30 a.m. in San Remo, Italy, seven months later in a rematch with Obelmejias. Hagler had long said his motto was "Destruction (sometimes simply 'Destruct') and Destroy," and to accommodate the 2,000 Italians in attendance at Teatro Ariston, he sported a T-shirt that read: "Distruzione E Distruttore." They got the message. Soon, so did Obelmejias.

Having learned his lesson in their first fight, Obelmejias took a lot less

punishment before being knocked out at 2:35 of the fifth round in another one-sided affair. In the crowd was Leonard, who had invited Hagler to come to Baltimore the following week for a press conference, where it was expected Leonard would announce a comeback to face Hagler after healing from a detached retina.

Leonard told Hagler several times that week in Italy how big the fight would be, which led Hagler to say to Leonard on American television after he'd destroyed Obelmejias, "If we're such good friends, give me a payday." Later, Hagler told friends, "I put him on the spot." Turns out he didn't.

Hagler made the trek to Baltimore dressed in a tuxedo, only to hear Leonard say "it'll never happen." He wasn't about to challenge perhaps the best middleweight who ever lived, leaving Hagler angrily pursuing one-sided wins over guys like Tony Sibson (TKO 6) and Wilford Scypion (KO 4).

Poor Sibson had an apt description of what it was like to face Hagler when he said after having been knocked down twice, "I couldn't find him for the first two rounds. I asked myself, 'Where did he go?' But I knew he was there, because he kept hitting me."

By the end, Sibson had gashes over both eyes and his nose and mouth were bleeding. After looking at his disfigured face in a mirror the next morning, he told a reporter, "I never believed anyone could do to me what he did. That Hagler's an artist."

The kind of damage Hagler regularly inflicted over the years once led his manager, Pat Petronelli, to say, "He's retired more fighters than old age. Marvin gives the hospital a lot of business."

Six months after stopping Scypion, Hagler finally got his first opportunity to fight a legend when he faced Roberto Duran, who was 77-4 and had made a surprising comeback. After having looked like a shadow of himself in back-to-back losses a year earlier, Duran rallied to beat former welterweight champ Pipino Cuevas and then WBA junior middleweight titleholder Davey Moore five months before agreeing to face Hagler. The Hands of Stone were back.

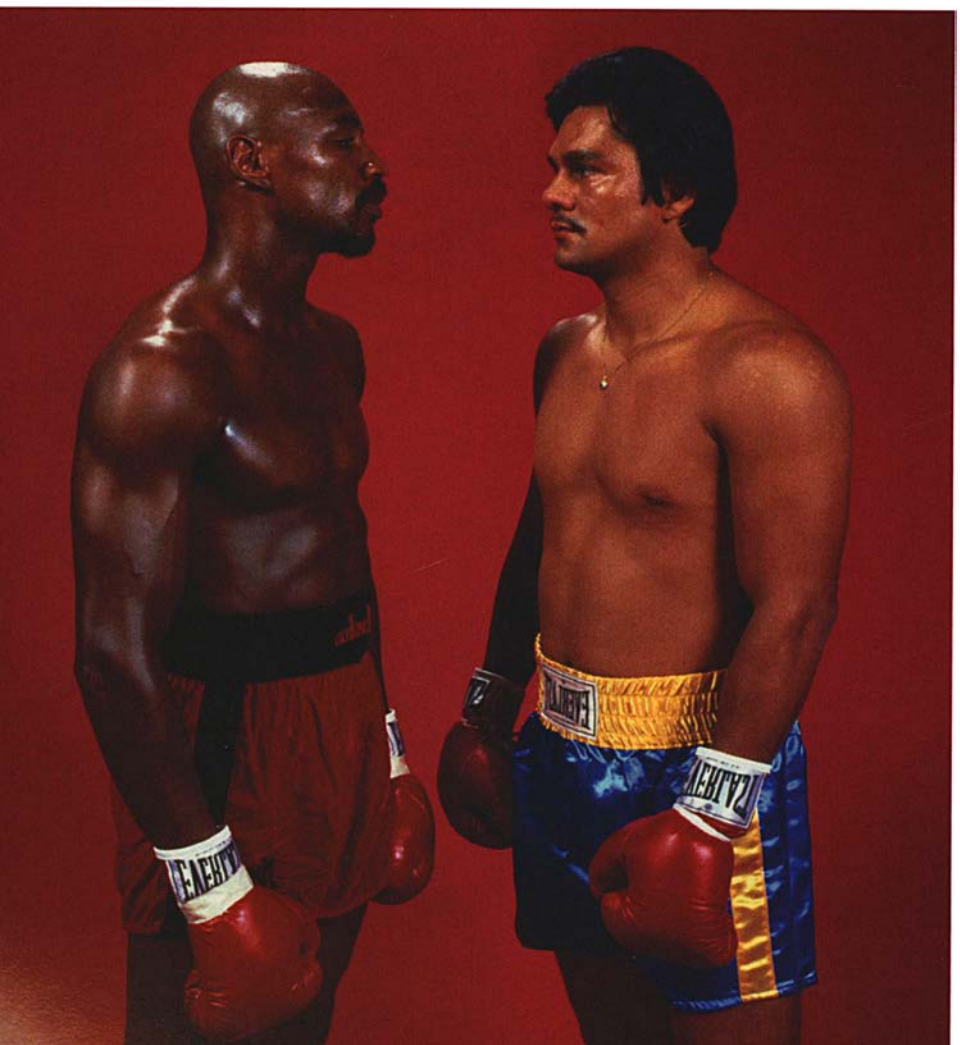
The pace was uncharacteristically cautious that night until Hagler rocked Duran in the sixth round but failed to press that advantage. Soon after, Duran climbed back into the fight. He thumbed Hagler in the left eye in the next round, causing significant swelling. A clash of heads had Hagler's eye bleeding in the 13th. When the round ended, Duran led on two scorecards and was even on the third.

It appeared Hagler's reign was about to end, but he marshaled the fury of all those past slights, real and imagined, and won the last two rounds by constantly pressuring a tiring Duran. Hagler's close but unanimous decision led critics to insist he'd been intimidated, missing entirely what he had accomplished.

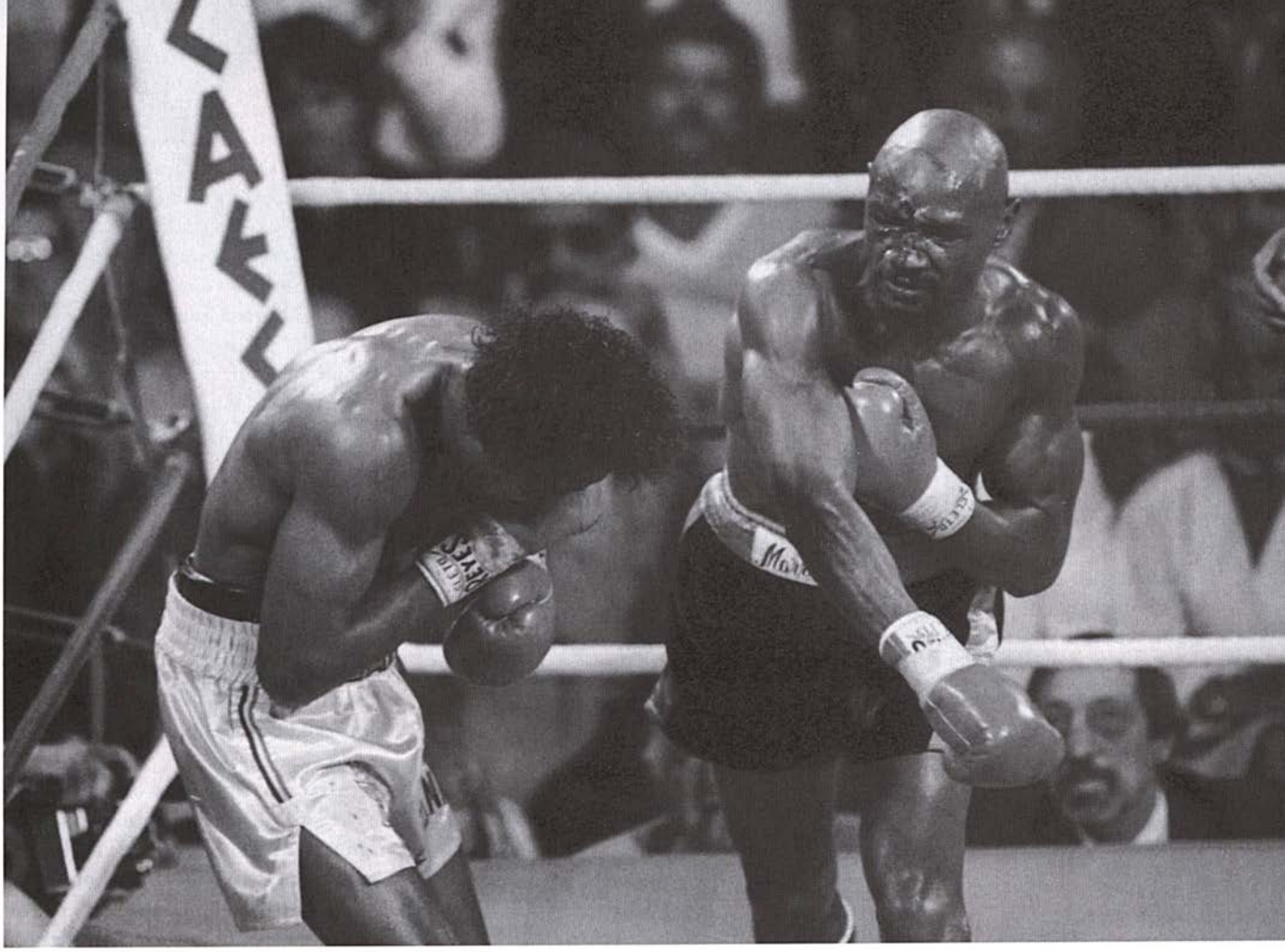
"It seemed everyone was disappointed that I didn't knock him out," Hagler said. "I felt that way myself, but he wasn't that vulnerable to a knockout. You don't barrel in there on a guy like Roberto Duran. I'd been effective and was winning the fight, so it isn't like I had to go in there and take the punishment to bomb him out."

For someone whose mantra had always been "Destruction and Destroy," it seemed an odd response. But soon after, he returned to his more familiar ways at the expense of challengers Juan Roldan and Hamsho in a rematch, two wins that set the stage for his signature moment – a fearsome confrontation with Thomas Hearns on April 15, 1985.

Roldan took a one-sided beating for 10 rounds but did get credit for the only knockdown of Hagler's career. Frankly it is difficult to knock someone down when the punch you throw misses its mark, but Roldan



Hagler felt that he should have received more credit for his win over the great Roberto Duran.



pushed down on Hagler's neck on his follow-through and the champion's back foot slipped, and down he went.

Hagler argued the point with the referee but didn't win, so he took it out on Roldan. By the third round, Roldan's right eye was nearly shut and he was basically a cyclops thereafter. Considering how poorly he'd done with two eyes, this was a distinct disadvantage.

Unbelievably, Hagler's rematch with Hamsho was the only time the champion fought in Madison Square Garden, but he didn't stay long, stopping Hamsho at 2:31 of the third round. Hagler had entered this fight particularly surly after Hamsho twice insulted him, leading the champion to remark, "Hamsho was better off when he didn't speak English. I don't want to see this man's face any more. Eliminate!"

So he did. When Hagler dropped Hamsho, it was the first time the challenger had been off his feet in 43 fights. Hamsho had needed 55 stitches after their first meeting. This time all he needed was a pillow. As things would turn out, so would Hearns.

Nobody could deny Hagler's greatness after he crushed Thomas Hearns inside three rounds.

Hagler's epic clash with Hearns was the first megafight of his career, and it began with a two-week, 22-city promotional tour that led to Hagler hating everything about the boastful Hearns. Hearns was 40-1 with 34 knockouts, his only loss being to Leonard. Brimming with confidence, he kept promising the fight would be over with Hagler knocked out in three rounds. He was half-right.

The opening round is widely considered the most ferocious three minutes in boxing history. Each man sandblasted the other, but the key moment came when Hearns twice exploded massive right hands on Hagler's head. Hagler wobbled for an instant but refused to buckle. Hearns' hand did instead, breaking in several places. Hearns had planned to box the first half of the fight, but Hagler's relentless pressure now forced him into a firefight he could not win.

A severe cut had opened up in the middle of Hagler's forehead in the opening round and referee Richard Steele twice called for the doctor to examine it. The second time came in Round 3 and Hagler was convinced the powers that had so often conspired against him were about to steal his title. Enraged when Steele asked if he could see, Hagler snapped,

"HE'S RETIRED MORE FIGHTERS THAN OLD AGE. MARVIN GIVES THE HOSPITAL A LOT OF BUSINESS." - PAT PETRONELLI

"I ain't missing him, am I?"

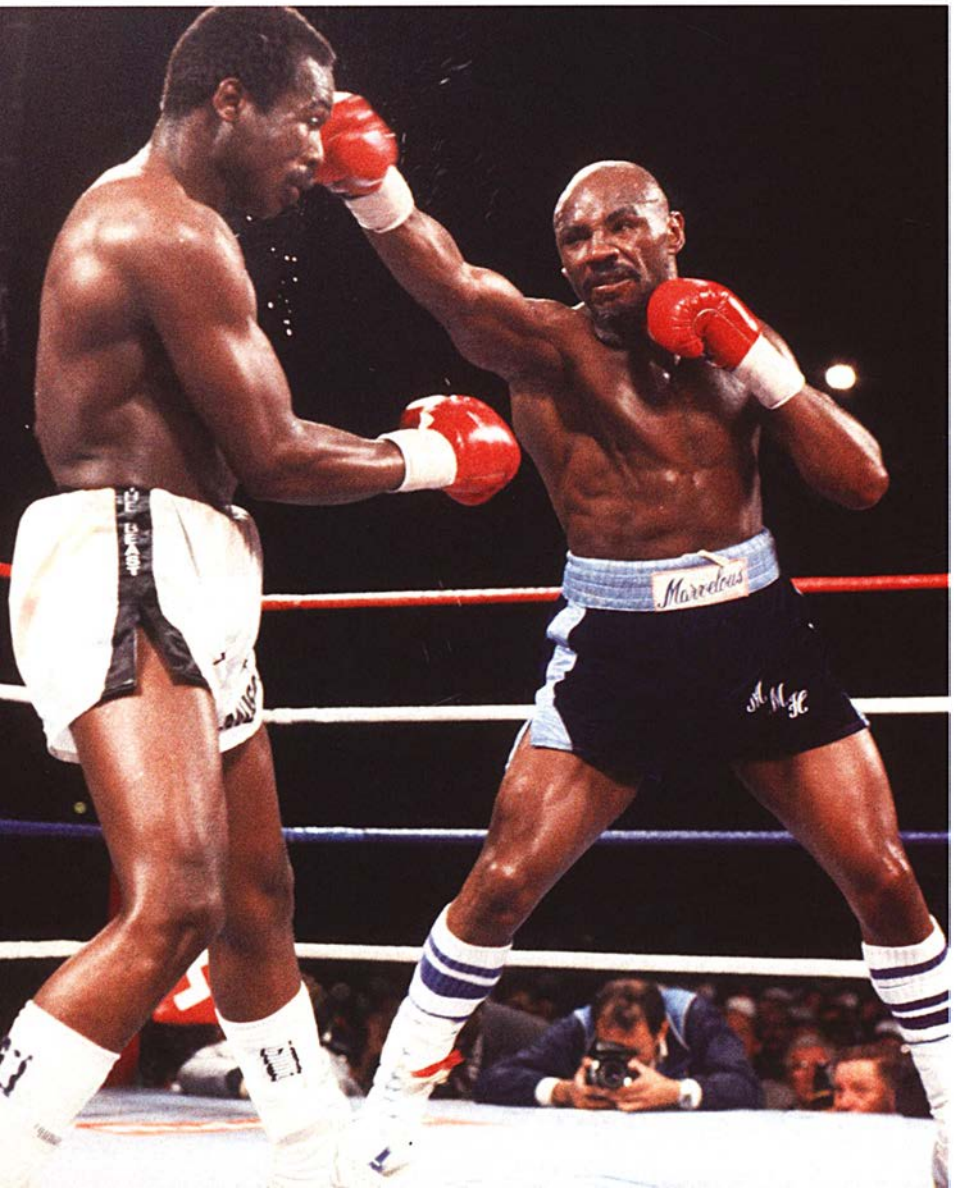
Fearing judges' pencils more than Hearns' fists, Hagler attacked again, hurting Hearns badly with a chopping right and then two hard shots on the hips. Rubbery legged, Hearns reeled backward, seeking an escape route where none existed. Hagler chased him down, pinning him on the ropes and finishing him with a crushing right to the jaw. Hearns went limp and collapsed on his back, his eyes unseeing.

Somehow Hearns rose at the count of nine but was defenseless. Before Hagler could finish him, Steele wrapped Hearns in protective custody. Eight seconds shy of eight minutes, the fight was over. Tommy Hearns had been right about the round but wrong about whose greatness would be confirmed in it.

After 65 professional fights and 61 victories, Marvelous Marvin Hagler was finally the superstar he'd long believed he was. He was favorably compared with Carlos Monzon, whose record of 14 consecutive title defenses he was closing in on. He became a pitchman for various products and a regular guest on television talk shows. All that was left was pursuing Monzon's record.

Just under a year later, he would make his 12th title defense against a man so fearsome he was called "The Beast." Who but Hagler would face Hearns and John Mugabi, 25-0 with 25 knockouts, in back-to-back fights?

John Mugabi got off to a great start, but Hagler would feast on "The Beast" in the 11th.



The two had fierce exchanges through the first half of the fight, with Mugabi giving as good as he got, but by the end of the 10th the challenger sat spent and badly beaten in his corner as his manager, Mickey Duff, exhorted him to press on. "Do it for the children, John! Do it for the children," Duff pleaded.

As much as he loved his children, Mugabi was a beast no more. He was just another guy who couldn't stand up to the punishment Hagler relentlessly dished out. When Hagler dropped Mugabi with a barrage of punches barely a minute into Round 11, "The Beast" sat crumbled where he landed, his arms resting on his knees, as the referee counted him out. It was the 11th time Hagler knocked out a challenger in his epic run of defenses.

After the fight was over, Hagler's years of being marginalized and ignored spilled over and he barked, "I took a guy with all those knockouts and I destroyed him. Him and Hearns, back to back. Now maybe all those doubters will shut up.

"They been trying to get rid of me for years. I believe they really won't give me credit until I'm done with the game. It's like I haven't proven myself yet. What do they want? The record, that's what I'm looking for."

Marvin Hagler would not fight again for 13 months. When he did, he would get his long-held wish. Sugar Ray Leonard had surprisingly agreed to come out of a three-year retirement to face him in Las Vegas, the city of long odds. It was the only time Leonard earned less money than his opponent, in part because he paid several million dollars to convince Hagler to accept a 12-round fight instead of the normal 15, a larger-than-normal ring and 10-ounce gloves instead of eight. Except for the fact they ended up earning Hagler $20 million to Leonard's $12 million, those decisions proved to be unwise.

The IBF refused to sanction the fight and the WBA stripped Hagler for not facing its No. 1 contender, leaving only the WBC belt at stake, but the truth was this fight was never

War was literally on Hagler's mind ahead of his final outing against fellow great Sugar Ray Leonard.

about belts to Hagler. It was about evening all the scores he felt had gone against him for so many years during his climb from nowhere to Marvelous. In his opinion, Leonard had always had a silver spoon in his mouth while he'd had no spoon at all. It was payback time.

Hagler was the aggressor all night, but Leonard was elusive, fighting only in spurts in the first few seconds and final 30 seconds of each round. He was a master illusionist in a town that loves magicians, and he mesmerized two of the judges, escaping with a controversial split decision that left Hagler stunned and convinced he'd again been victimized by the politics of boxing.

Leonard made Hagler look awkward at times but spent most of the fight in retreat, leading Hagler to holler at one point, "Fight like a man, you little bitch!" Instead, Leonard fought like a disappearing act, winning a split decision still argued over 34 years later. One of the most apt analyses of what happened was penned by the great British boxing writer Hugh McIlvanney for Sports Illustrated. He called the decision "an epic illusion."

For a year, Hagler pursued a rematch, but Leonard had retired again. Finally, so did Hagler, moving to Milan, Italy, to pursue an acting career. He starred in several action films, remarried and built a happy life for himself. Three years after their first fight, Leonard had promoter Bob Arum approach Hagler about a $15 million rematch. Hagler replied with the ferocity he'd so often shown in the ring.

"Tell Ray to get a life," he said.

When Hagler was later asked about that moment, he smiled serenely and said, "I considered the $15 million, but it didn't come close to changing my mind. If I didn't understand what happened in that fight, then it would bother me. But I understand. They took the fight from me. Boxing screwed me one last time."

He may not have broken Monzon's record, but he beat the boxing game. Marvelous Marvin Hagler retired with a 62-3-2 record and 52 knockouts. He is on the short list of the greatest middleweights of all time. More significantly, he was one of the few who never answered the siren call of a comeback. The same unbreakable will he'd shown throughout his career that allowed him to destroy Tommy Hearns and so many others gave him the steel never to return.

His last act inside a boxing ring had been a disdainful wave in the direction of the judges after the Leonard decision was announced. Then he just walked away.

Hagler saved much of the estimated $40 million he earned in boxing and lived a contented life until passing away unexpectedly at the age of 66 on March 13 at his summer home in New Hampshire, where he and his wife had gone to escape the COVID-19 virus sweeping across Italy. The exact cause of his death was not announced, but for anyone who saw him fight, you knew it wasn't from a heart problem.

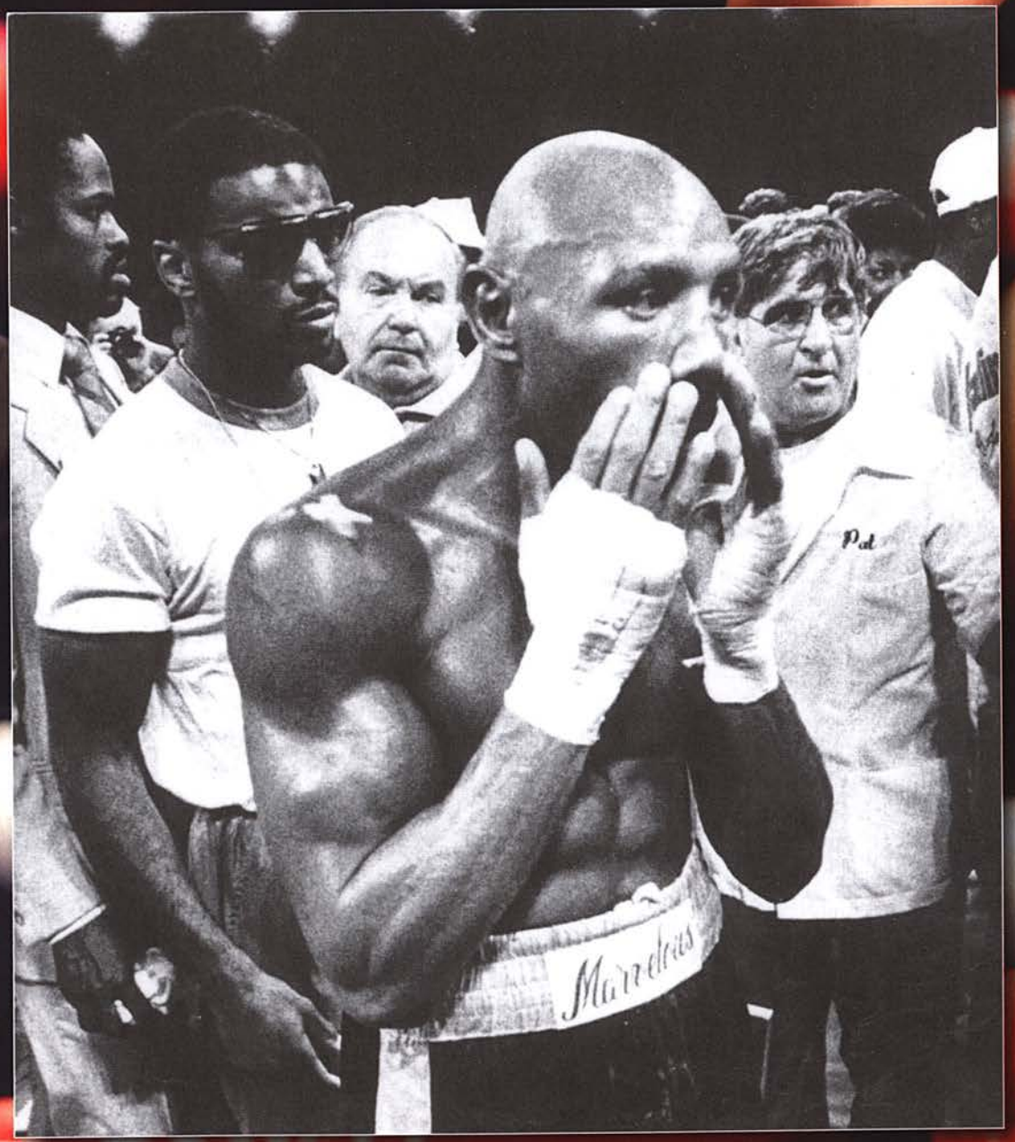
BETTMANN

ROLE OF A LIFETIME

PUTTING AN OCEAN BETWEEN HIMSELF AND BOXING, HAGLER GAVE UP THE RING TO PURSUE AN ACTING CAREER IN ITALY, BUT HIS RENUNCIATION ONLY ADDED TO HIS ENDURING MYSTIQUE

By **Don Stradley**

The announcement felt anticlimactic. It was Sunday, June 12, 1988. Marvelous Marvin Hagler had been ringside for NBC, providing commentary, while his brother Robbie Sims lost a 12-round decision to Sumbu Kalambay in Ravenna, Italy. After the verdict was given, Hagler was asked about his own future. He'd been away from boxing, and people were wondering if he would ever fight again. He casually told the television audience that he was "going to say goodbye to boxing, retire and go into the movies." »



Disillusioned by his 1987 loss to Leonard, Hagler never fought again.

VALERY HACHE

(INSET) BOSTON GLOBE

He later said this was "the saddest day" of his life. At the time, it happened with the proverbial whimper, rather than a bang. It was hard to believe that Hagler, at 34, was done with boxing.

Just weeks earlier, he'd walked into the Brockton gym office of his longtime trainer and mentor, Goody Petronelli. Hagler declared right then that he was going to quit boxing. He'd had enough of it.

"I was a little surprised," Petronelli said many years later. "I asked him, 'Is that really what you want to do?' He said, 'Yes.' I think he was tired of the training, because no one ever trained like Marvin Hagler. I think he was tired of that, more than the fighting."

Petronelli gave Hagler a hug and simply congratulated him on what had been one hell of a career. Hagler didn't want the newspapers to know about his retirement, so Petronelli promised to stay quiet on the subject. Of course, there were many more discussions about it, because Petronelli felt his fighter would come back if the money was right. "One time," Goody recalled, "Marvin, my brother Pat and myself stayed up until three in the morning, sitting in Pat's kitchen. We'd say, 'Marvin, are you sure?' And he'd always say, 'Yes. I'm sure.' He wanted to go and enjoy life. People would ask us, 'Is Marvin fighting again?' We'd just say he was in Italy. That's where he was most of the time."

During the next two years, Hagler's name sporadically appeared in boxing columns, usually in reference to comeback rumors. Some of the talk included Hagler taking part in a tournament to name a new middleweight champion, where he might fight Michael Nunn or James Toney, while Ray Leonard even approached Hagler with an offer for a return bout. Hagler wasn't interested. There were occasional meetings between the Petronellis and Bob Arum, but all of the talk and speculation amounted to nothing. By 1990, Hagler was officially divorced from his first wife, Bertha, and living in Milan.

Following his retirement, Hagler, seen here with martial arts star Chuck Norris in 1987, pursued a film career.

The myth, of course, is that Hagler went overseas and became a movie star. That's a slight overstatement, the work of gullible sportswriters trying to attach a happy ending to Hagler's often bitter life story, but it is true that he appeared in four movies. At one point, he was taking acting classes and having meetings with Hollywood types. He'd allegedly been offered roles where he'd play a boxer, which he turned down. He also didn't want to play characters where drugs were involved, since that would be setting a bad example. This was ironic, because Hagler was no angel when it came to partying.

By the time Hagler bolted for Italy, he had appeared in the NBC sitcoms *Punky Brewster* and *227*. He'd also appeared in a popular Pizza Hut campaign and then joined Hulk Hogan and football's Brian Bosworth in a promotion for Right Guard deodorant sticks. Pleased with his cut-rate TV stardom, Hagler vowed to "get the taste of boxing out of my mouth." He still consented to interviews in that 1989-90 period, insisting that he had given up boxing to be in movies. Acting, he said, was better than getting whacked in the head for a living. Soon there was talk of *Indio*, Hagler's first starring role. Boston sportswriters joked that Hagler was in a jungle somewhere, trying to become the new Rambo.

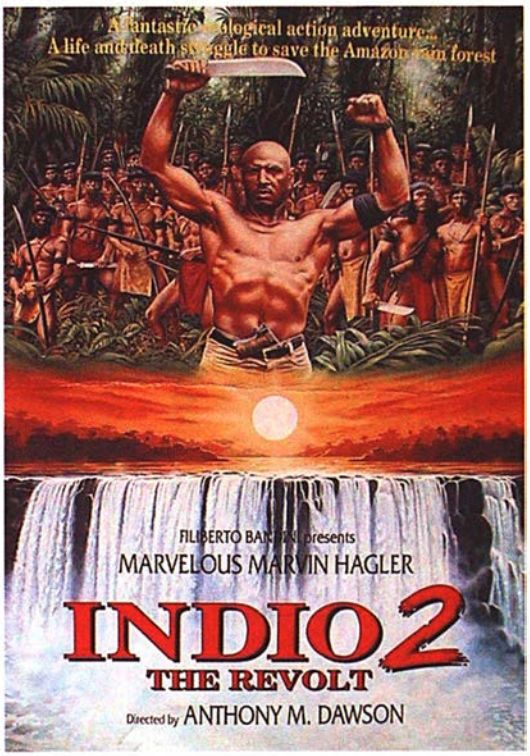
Indio was a cheap Italian action flick in the vein of American movies such as *First Blood* and *Missing in Action*. Filmed in locations ranging from South America to the Philippines to Borneo, the movie ended up in the dreaded "direct to video" category, the place where mediocre films were relegated in those days. *Indio* was neither terrible nor good; it was just a quickie project to cash in on a popular genre. Hagler seemed happy, though. That was all that mattered. He sent pictures back to the Petronellis, funny

Hagler with basketball legend Michael Jordan in 2002 at a sports event in Monte Carlo.

shots of himself in a jeep, riding through the muck of a makeshift movie set.

Another myth is that Hagler made a smooth transition into retirement. The truth is that he went through a long rough patch. His marriage fell apart. He drank too much. There was some shameful behavior, including a charge of beating a woman in a Boston hotel, to which he pleaded guilty and served a year's probation. At one point, the mayor of Brockton removed a picture of Hagler from City Hall. The mayor felt it was wrong to celebrate such a man. The picture was put back a few years later, but there was a period where Hagler's conduct was poor. Between court dates, there was his 1993 induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame and, of course, plenty of talk about his so-called movie career.

Few took note of *Indio*, though its director, Antonio Margheriti, promptly put Hagler in *Indio II: The Revolt* (1991). Margheriti, a veteran of low-budget Italian cinema, called upon Hagler again in 1997 for *Virtual Weapon*, a detective drama with a screenplay by the Fight Doctor himself, Ferdie Pacheco. Hagler also costarred in *Notti di Paura* (1991), an Italian production filmed in Russia. Four movies in eight years was fair for an ex-boxer, but certainly not the pace Hagler had wanted. Sportswriters continued to focus on Hagler the actor because it was an easy angle, but even Hagler sensed his movie career had gone cold. "I'm having the same struggles in the movie industry I had in boxing, but boxing taught me patience," Hagler said in 1997.



Above: The original artwork for one of Hagler's four Italian-made movies. Below: The former champion is all smiles during the "Parade of Champions" event at the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

In 2004, Sports Illustrated ran a "Where are they now?" story on Hagler. Without mentioning that he hadn't been in a film for seven years, he claimed he was waiting for that one big role that would change everything. "If the call comes, I'm going to be ready," Hagler said.

Hagler with his second wife, Kay, at the Nevada Boxing Hall of Fame induction gala in 2015.

In truth, the Italian film industry was done with Marvelous Marvin. His resume stood at four films. He stayed reasonably active as a ringside commentator for bouts in Britain, but there were no more movies.

What Hagler may not have realized was that once he was out of boxing, he lost much of his appeal to producers and directors. The novelty of casting a boxing champion or any active athlete in a film is valid, if only for exploitation of his name. But the longer a boxer is retired and out of the public eye, the less market value he has on a movie poster. Another factor is that Margheriti, the one director who seemed to like Hagler, died in 2002. Had Margheriti lived longer, he might've given Hagler another role to play.

The bittersweet part of this is that Hagler seemed to really like the idea of acting. Just before his bout with Thomas Hearns, he signed up with talent agencies in New York and Los Angeles. He also hired an agent, Marty Klein, who handled such stars as Steve Martin and Mary Tyler Moore. One of Hagler's first offers was a tempting one – the role of Hawk in ABC's *Spenser: For Hire*, a pilot episode based on the popular Robert B. Parker novels. Spenser, played by Robert Urich, was a Boston private eye, and Hawk was his street-smart sidekick. Warner Brothers was apparently serious about casting Hagler.

Unfortunately, Warner Brothers wanted actors to sign a long-term contract in case the pilot movie was picked up for a series. Hagler couldn't oblige because he was about to start training for Hearns. Hagler was excited about acting, though. "I want to show people I can talk, that I am colorful," Hagler said. "I have other abilities than just fighting."

He never quite gave up on the dream. Just six months before his death, Hagler told The Boston Herald, "I'm looking for another shot at a movie."

The real story of Hagler in retirement, however, has nothing to do with whether or not he was a movie star. The real story, and the one that tells us a bit about Hagler's inner workings, is about his flight from America.

Moving to Italy was a gamble, but he'd always liked it there. Early in his title reign, he fought in San Remo and was treated like a star. One might say that European boxing fans were quicker to embrace Hagler than Americans. The notion that he was more popular overseas must've stayed in his mind. When it looked like the Italian film business wanted him, that was enough incentive to pull up stakes in America and move on.

Relocating to Milan wasn't simply a way to thumb his nose at boxing or America. It felt that way to some observers, but there were more layers to Hagler's decision. He wanted to find a place where he wouldn't be constantly scrutinized, where he could party a bit without finding himself on the Boston nightly news. He craved privacy. One of the first things he did after winning the championship in 1980 was install a giant fence around his house to keep kids out of his yard. Now, as a former champion, he was putting up the biggest fence imaginable, an entire ocean between him and America. Italy became home.

"I like the country, the culture, the people," Hagler told SI's Rick Telander in 1990. "And I knew Milan had people who could help me get into movies. What happened was, I wanted to move. I needed a change in my life. People said I wouldn't last a week here, and, I'll tell you, this was a challenge. The first day I was here, I got locked in my room because my landlady didn't speak English, and I had to jump off the balcony, and then I had nothing to eat and no lira, and I'm this black guy who doesn't speak Italian, and, you know, I stuck it out because I'm a survivor. Now I love it here."

He also hired an attorney to run interference between him and all of those people trying to reach him, the people Hagler assumed were trying to make money off of him. Even some of Hagler's closest friends were denied his phone number. They had to contact him through his lawyer.

Hagler's big fear was that one bad business deal could cost him

the fortune he'd earned by fighting. There's no telling how much money he frittered away during his reckless years or forked over during his divorce. Now he simply wanted to keep his millions – and keep his sanity.

There were efforts made to lure Hagler back to America to attend Las Vegas events. His friends told him he should be more visible, otherwise the public was going to forget him. He was unconcerned; he had a home in New Hampshire, where he stayed in the summer, and he attended the International Boxing Hall of Fame's induction weekends almost every year. But as the 1990s turned into the 2000s, he showed less interest in revisiting the boxing world. He was good to fans, he enjoyed certain charity events, and there are dozens of stories where he gladly took time to sign an autograph or pose for a picture, but generally he laid low. We didn't see him at big fights, and when offers were made for him to appear somewhere, he rejected far more than he accepted.

If Hagler had a concern about being forgotten, he never showed it. He'd had all the accolades a man could want and had made more money than he'd ever imagined. He'd been deemed by Sport magazine the highest-paid athlete in the world for two consecutive years, 1983 and '84, back when it was shocking for a sports figure to make $5 million in a 12-month span. If he wanted to relax and be away from the crowd, he'd certainly earned the right. He occasionally appeared at major events – a 1997 trip to South Africa where he met Nelson Mandela and helped promote a PPV bout involving Roberto Duran was both lucrative and interesting for him – though he did things at his own pace and on his own schedule. While Duran lived out the clichéd life of an aging pug still trying to make a buck, Hagler was content to live well, eat well and travel well. That became his story. He let the others fight; he was glad to be away from it all.

But if Hagler's name meant a bit less to the general populace with each passing decade, he seemed to become more fascinating to boxing fans. The fans who had enjoyed him in the 1980s were joined by a new generation that had learned about him through YouTube clips. These new fans recognized a genuine badass when they saw one. The old fans recalled him with nostalgia. As the 2000s rolled along, it was clear that there weren't many fighters like Marvelous Marvin. More than one professional football coach, including Bill Belichick, showed the Hagler-Hearns fight to their teams before important games, trying to rev them up. It usually worked, too.

In a way, Hagler's stature grew without him trying so hard. His so-called isolation served to nourish the aura of mystery that legends require. He didn't have to appear at every stinking memorabilia convention and hotel opening, smiling when he didn't feel like it, engaging with strangers. He was content to stay out of the spotlight and let his work speak for him. He was like a rare coin. When he did turn up, it was damned special.

During one of his stateside visits, Hagler was a guest at a star-studded Caesars Palace event. His old

The Marvelous One faces off with Nelson Mandela in 1997.

Three Kings: Hagler with former foes Thomas Hearns and Sugar Ray Leonard.

rivals Leonard and Hearns were at nearby tables. Eventually, Leonard approached Hagler and proposed the three of them work together and establish a promotional group. As he related the story to the Boston Globe in 1997, Hagler felt that Leonard was simply being greedy, wanting to cut in on the action of younger fighters. Hagler never liked sharing the spotlight with anyone, and he wasn't about to join forces with Leonard. He told Hearns and Leonard to "get a life," and he walked away.

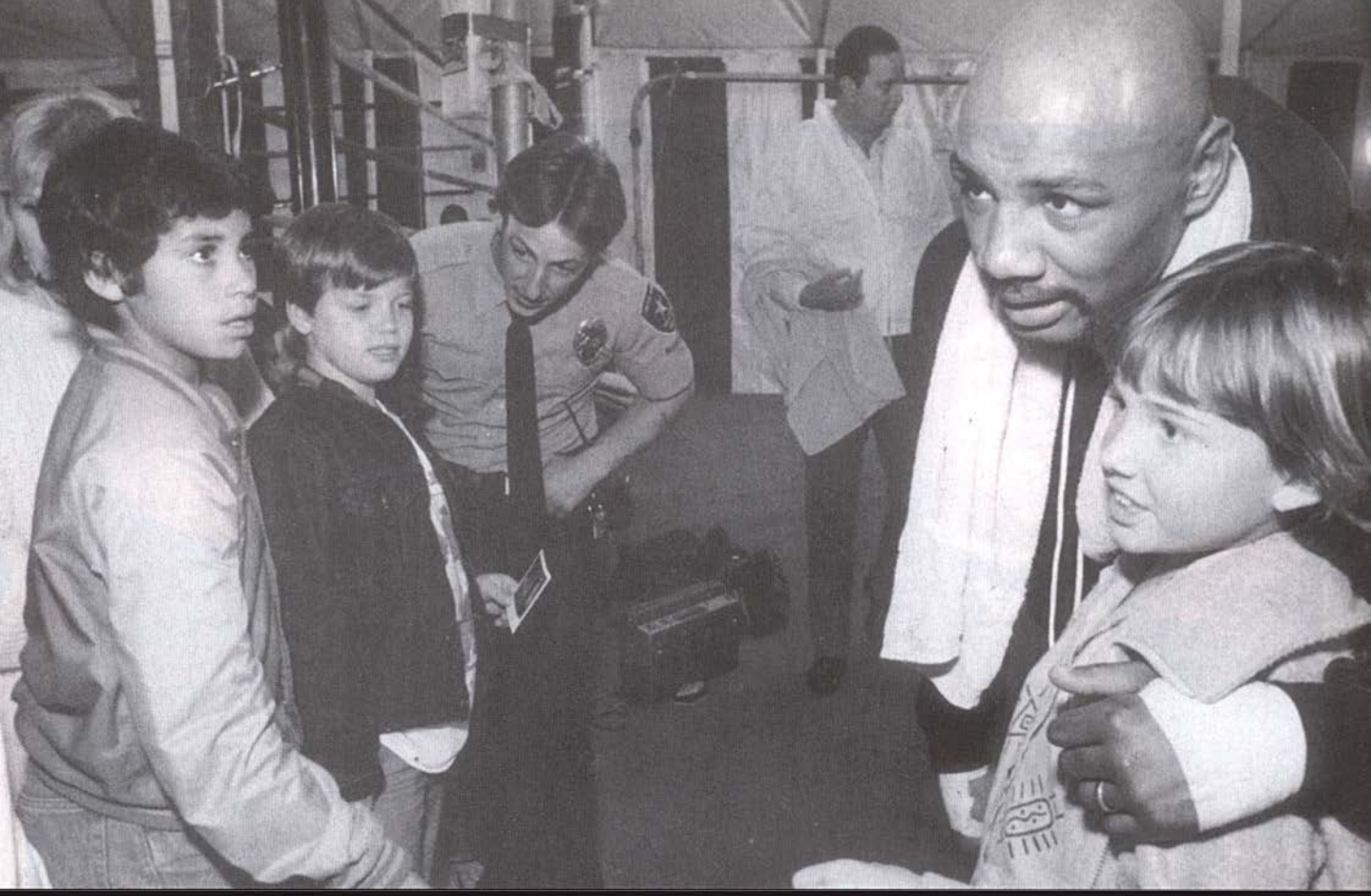
With the 2008 publication of *The Four Kings* by author George Kimball, it became standard to refer to Hagler, Leonard, Hearns and Duran as a sort of four-headed beast that ruled boxing in the 1980s. Though the book's title remains a popular catchphrase, Hagler disliked the whole notion of "the four kings." Looking at it from his point of view, we can understand why. He defeated Hearns. He defeated Duran. In his mind, and the minds of many others, he defeated Leonard, too. Why, Hagler wondered, was he being tied in with them forever? When a BBC commentator asked him about it on a panel show, Hagler sneered. "There was only one king," Hagler said. "And it was me."

Generally, however, Hagler spent his final years as a magnanimous fellow. He appeared to find great happiness with his second wife, Kay. He loved boxing but kept it at a comfortable distance behind him. He appreciated being remembered, and he understood his place in boxing history, though he possessed a kind of humility when talking about himself. The old anger he carried for so many years seemed to melt away. Life was good.

Interviews became less frequent, and he usually said the same old things. He had his pat answers and didn't bother trying to be verbose. Now and then, however, he could startle you with an insight. In 2017, he appeared on a YouTube channel called *This is Opus*, where he was asked to define greatness. Looking aged and slightly battle-scarred, he scratched his famous bald head and laughed. Then he turned serious.

"Greatness is something you can't really touch," he said. He talked a bit more on the subject. He talked about never being satisfied during his career, which is what pushed him forward. Speaking this way had never been his strong suit, and it is fascinating to watch him search for the proper words, digging in like a jazz player trying to find the right notes. "I don't think I've achieved greatness yet," he finally said. "It could still be out there."

Of Hagler's many bold incarnations – the angry man, the champion, the recluse – this might've been the very best of them. Here was a fighter far away from his most glorious days, still baffled by the secret of greatness, offering nothing but a friendly smile. This was better than being the new Rambo. He was a man at peace.



THE NOBLE WARRIOR

HAGLER, A CONSUMMATE PROFESSIONAL WHO EMBODIED THE VIRTUES OF BOXING DESPITE THE SHADY SIDE OF THE SPORT, REMAINED LOYAL TO HIS FRIENDS DURING HIS HARD ROAD TO GREATNESS

By **Steve Kim**

On the afternoon of March 13, 2021, boxing fans who grew up during the 1980s lost a little bit of their childhood as news spread that the great Marvelous Marvin Hagler had unexpectedly passed away in New Hampshire at the age of 66.

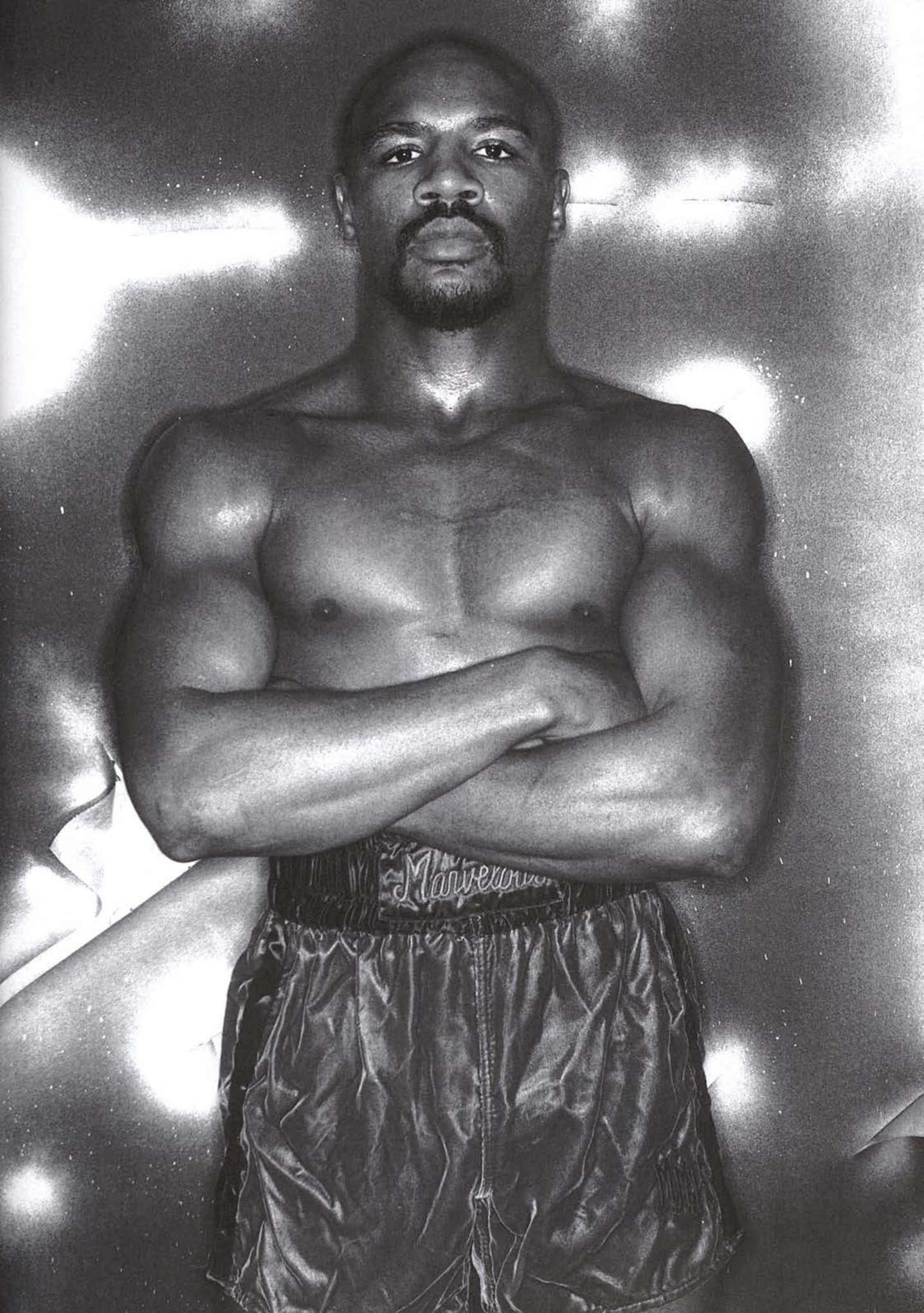
Boxing lost more than one of its all-time greats; it lost the best representation of a time when the fight game was more important to the American sports landscape.

Alongside the trio of Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns and Robert Duran, the Four Kings carried the boxing business after the retirement of Muhammad Ali and bridged the gap until Mike Tyson began his malevolent rule as the undisputed heavyweight champion.

Hagler's personality and style weren't as dynamic as his peers, but he symbolized what a boxer should be and how they should conduct themselves. While perhaps the least-known of this storied foursome going into the '80s, he eventually became a fan favorite and an iconic figure in his own right.

Hagler was responsible for helping create a generation of boxing fans that has carried on into the 21st century. He was the rare fighter universally beloved and respected, whose stature grew in retirement as he steadfastly refused to return to the ring after walking away. That alone makes him noteworthy and admirable.

"A true professional prizefighter, and a champion," is how longtime HBO analyst Larry Merchant described him. "A professional in a sense that he could box, he could bang, he could take a shot. When you paid to see him perform, you



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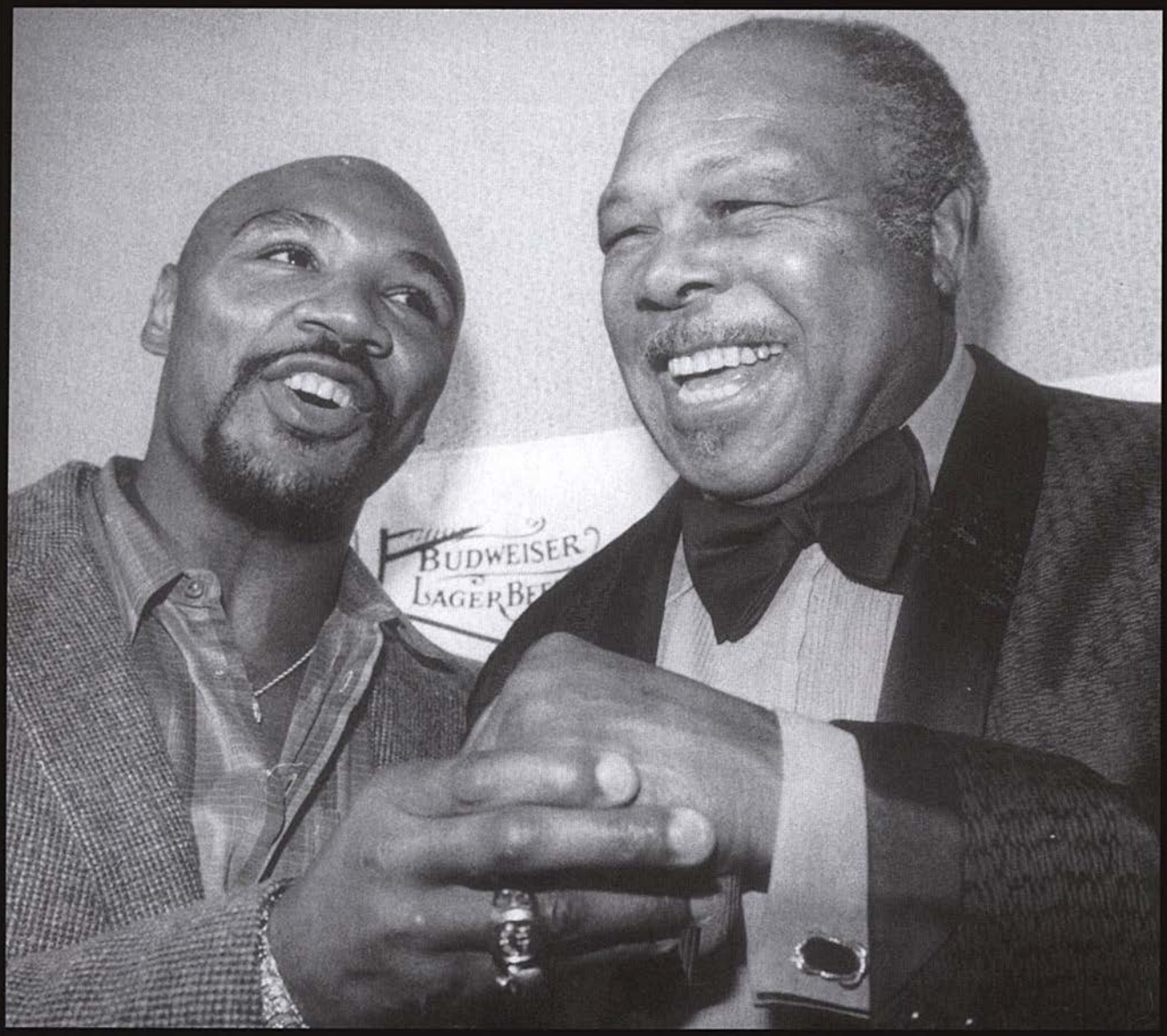


Real recognized real: Hagler meets up with former light heavyweight king Archie Moore at a press conference in 1984.

got what you paid for."

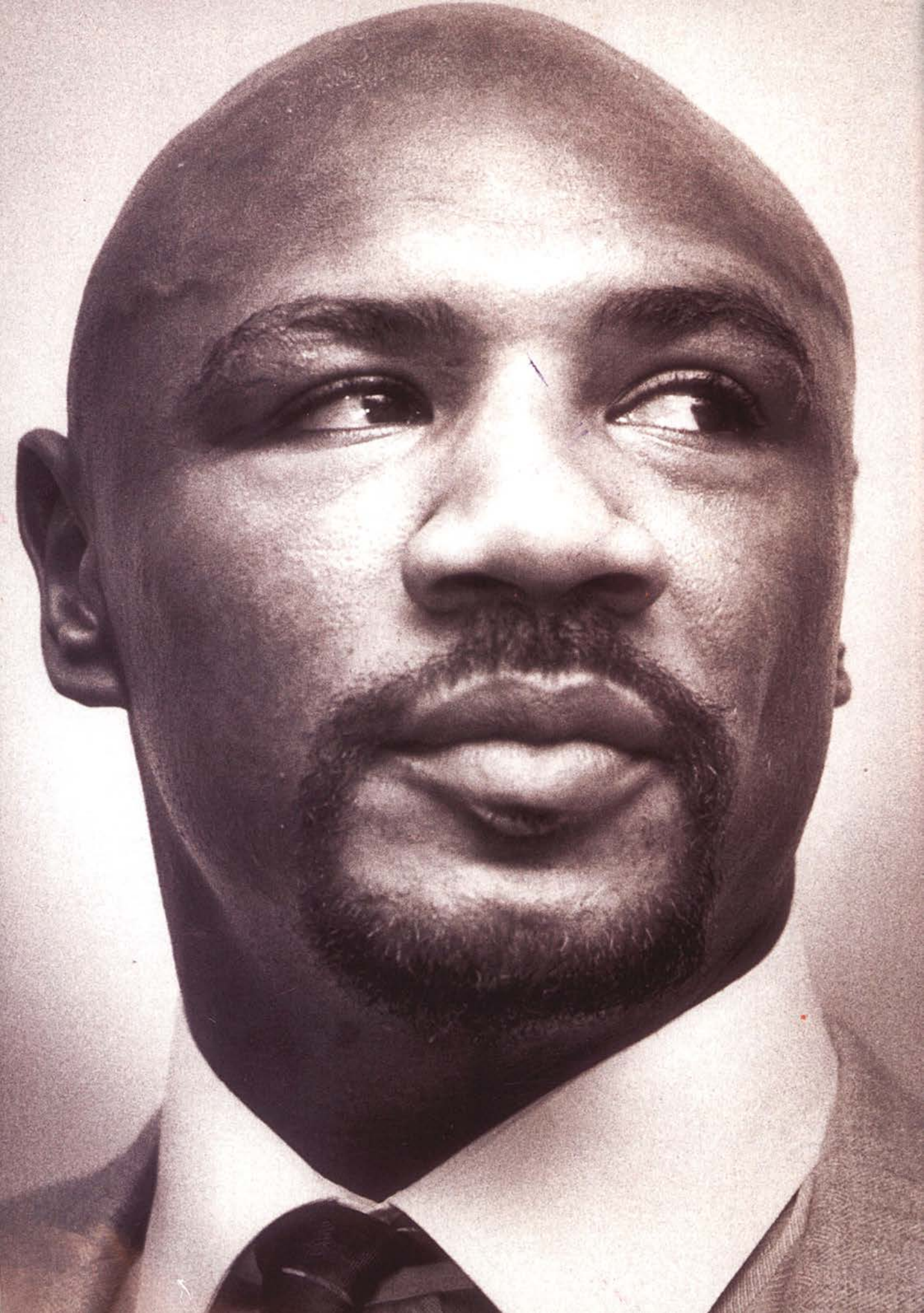
But while Hagler always delivered in the ring, it would take a long time for the sport to deliver for him. His road to the title was long and hard. From his humble pro debut at the Brockton High School Gymnasium on May 18, 1973, where he stopped Terry Ryan in two rounds, until his years as an avoided contender, Hagler would find himself on the outside looking in as it related to the byzantine world of boxing.

Career advancement in boxing oftentimes is not based on meritocracy but rather shady dealings and unholy unions. Still, Hagler wanted to earn his status in the sport. At his insistence, Goody and Pat Petronelli (who trained and managed him throughout his career) took him into Philadelphia, where he could test himself against the best middleweights that storied boxing city had to offer.

From 1976 to 1980, he engaged in a series of bouts versus the likes of Bobby "Boogaloo" Watts, Willie "The Worm" Monroe, Eugene "Cyclone" Hart and "Bad" Bennie Briscoe, making regular visits to the Spectrum and compiling a record of 5-2 against that quartet while forging himself into the No. 1 middleweight contender in the world.

The only problem was that he was effectively being blackballed by the powers that be, which is why Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy and Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill wrote a letter strongly "suggesting" to Bob Arum that he do his part to help facilitate the hard-earned title shot for their constituent.

Arum said that being a staunch Democrat, he was honored that they would reach out to him, but he also admitted he was "scared to death," as he didn't want to be known as that generation's Frankie Carbo. So, starting with Hagler's bout with



Norberto Cabrera (an eighth-round stoppage victory) in Monaco in the summer of 1979 until the end of his career in 1987, Arum was Hagler's promoter.

Hagler eventually won the middleweight crown in 1980 by bludgeoning Alan Minter in England (then quickly leaving the ring and a rioting Wembley Arena amid a hailstorm of bottles that came from all sections).

The Hagler-Arum union lasted 19 bouts as the switch-hitting middleweight went from a relatively unknown champion to a nationally known sports celebrity who scored endorsement deals with Right Guard and Pizza Hut, sat on the couch as a guest of Johnny Carson on The Tonight Show and paid a visit to the White House and Ronald Reagan. And while he was originally from Newark, New Jersey, he was more than embraced by his adopted hometown of Brockton, Massachusetts, and the New England region.

"There were two big sports stories in Boston at the time – it was Marvelous Marvin Hagler and the Boston Celtics," said Arum, who recalled that the local network affiliates in the region would battle for access to the local favorite during his middleweight title reign.

Through it all, Hagler insisted that the Petronellis take their 33 percent, even as his paydays increased, and his contract with the storied promoter was nothing more than a handshake.

"The thing about Marvin that differentiates himself from most people that I met in life, certainly most people I've represented, is that he had unquestionable loyalty to those he dealt with. He dealt from a standpoint of 'You're with me and I'm with you. I'll have your back and you'll have mine,'" stated Arum, who thinks so highly of Hagler that the former middleweight champ is one of three boxers he has framed pictures of in his office (the other two being Muhammad Ali and George Foreman).

"That is really refreshing for me, something that is not usual in our society. He had a quality about him that almost epitomized the way he fought."

With his shaven skull and sculpted body, Hagler cut an imposing and intimidating figure. In many ways, he just looked like a modern-day gladiator. But this intimidating exterior hid a man of deep character who cared about others.

Ray Mancini, who read about Hagler's Philadelphia exploits in the pages of Ring Magazine as a teenage up-and-comer in Youngstown, Ohio, says that Hagler and Larry Holmes were the only two friends he had during his days as a hard-hitting matinee idol.

Mancini vividly recalls the night he lost his WBA lightweight title at the Memorial Auditorium in Buffalo, New York, in 1984. After being stopped in the 14th round by Livingstone Bramble, "Boom Boom" was dazed and disoriented.

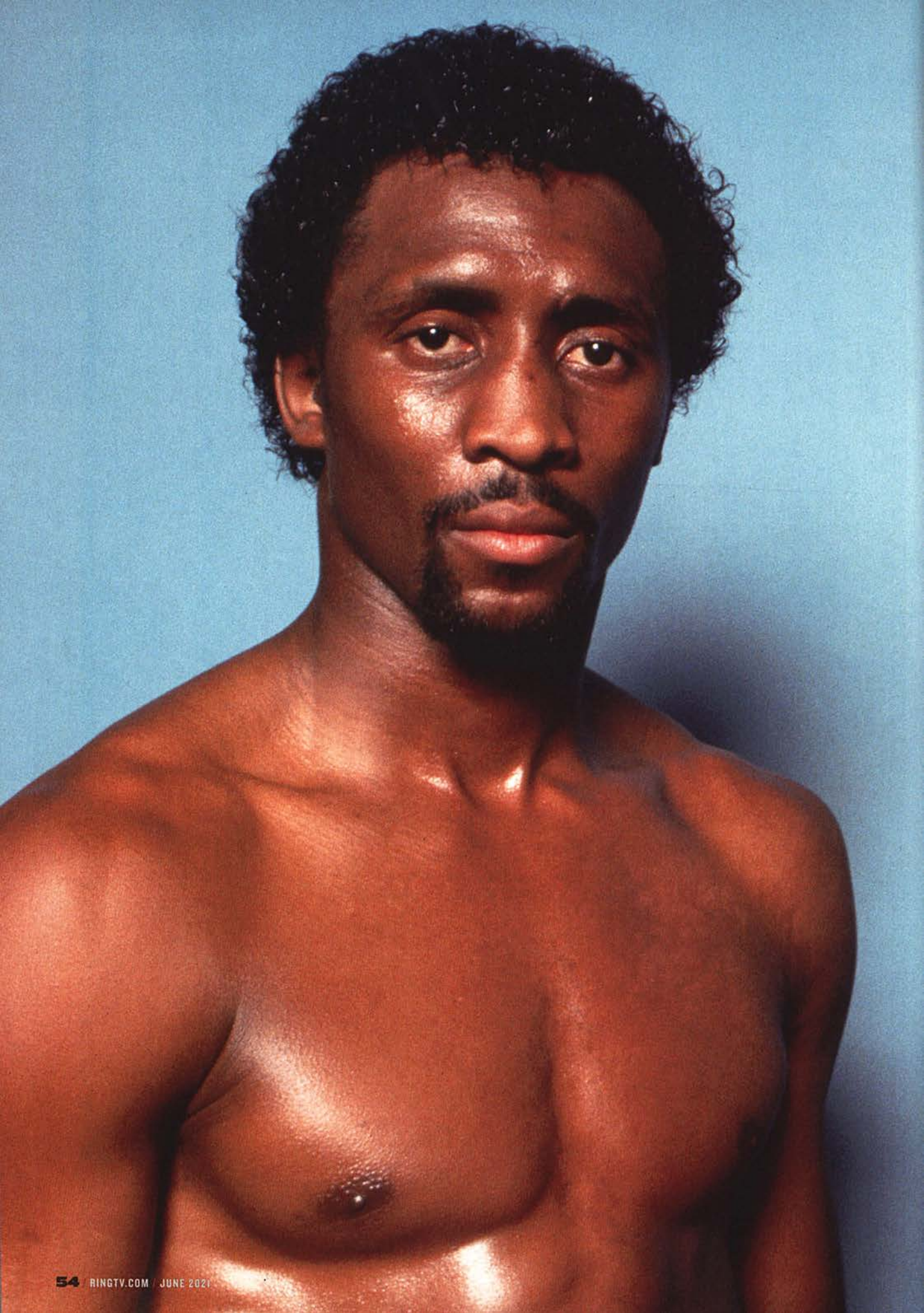
Both of his parents were in attendance and, Mancini recalls, "Marvin grabbed both and cleared the way for them to come up and see me. He stood up on the steps as they got into the ring to make sure I was OK. I loved him forever for that; I just appreciated him doing that. People don't understand, that's the type of guy he was.

"He was a beautiful person."

It turns out that Hagler was just as good out of the ring as he was in it.

"He was a wonderful, wonderful human being," said Arum. "You always knew where you stood with him."

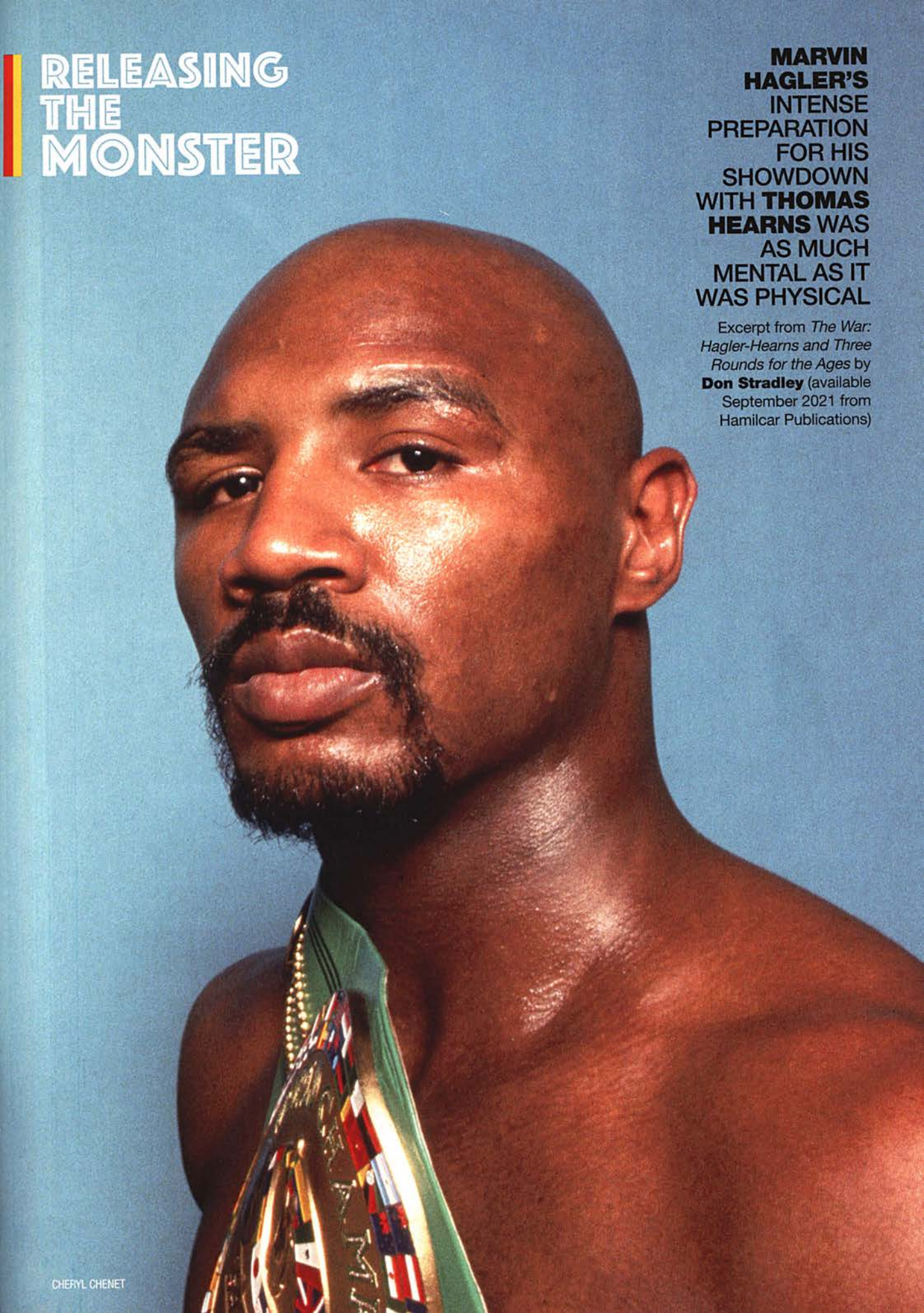
Arum (left of podium) worked with Hagler for over eight years and spearheaded his final fight in 1987.



RELEASING THE MONSTER

MARVIN HAGLER'S INTENSE PREPARATION FOR HIS SHOWDOWN WITH **THOMAS HEARNS** WAS AS MUCH MENTAL AS IT WAS PHYSICAL

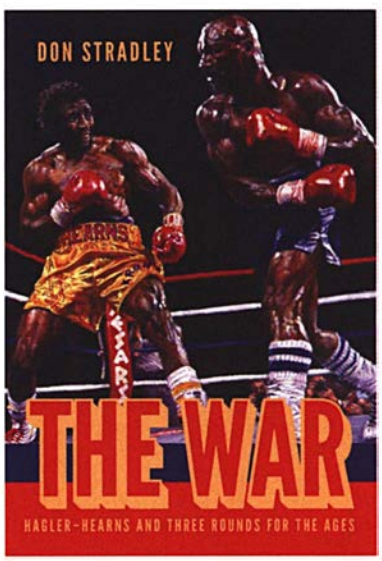
Excerpt from *The War: Hagler-Hearns and Three Rounds for the Ages* by **Don Stradley** (available September 2021 from Hamilcar Publications)



CHERYL CHENET

On Monday night, April 8, Marvelous Marvin Hagler arrived in Las Vegas. Welcomed to Caesars Palace by a parade of costumed Roman guards and princesses, he surveyed the crowd that surrounded him in the lobby and said, "I have come to destroy."

In an interview conducted in his suite, Hagler told a small gathering of reporters that he didn't want to train in the hotel facility because he'd feel like "a circus performer." Wanting the rawness of a real boxing environment, he'd planned some private workouts at Tocco's Ringside Gym, a dour cinderblock building five miles north of The Strip. Hagler told the press that he craved a dank, empty setting where he and the Petronellis could get their work done without interference. At Caesars, Hagler said, "every time you



Months of buildup culminated in an eight-minute tear-up that will never be forgotten.

fart it winds up on television."

Tocco's gym on Charleston Boulevard was basically a shabby old storefront with an iron-grated fence. The owner, Johnny Tocco, was a longtime boxing operator who had been a promoter in St. Louis and had once been Sonny Liston's manager. He'd worked the corner of fighters ranging from Willie Pep to Mike Weaver, and though he was in his seventies and in poor health, he remained a fixture of the Las Vegas fight scene. His gym, which had the ramshackle atmosphere seen in old 1940s boxing movies, was a favorite of fighters coming to Las Vegas. Tocco had once owned a bar, The Zebra Room, which had been adjacent to the space where fighters now trained. Tocco's favorite joke: "I got so tired of breaking up fights, I figured I might as

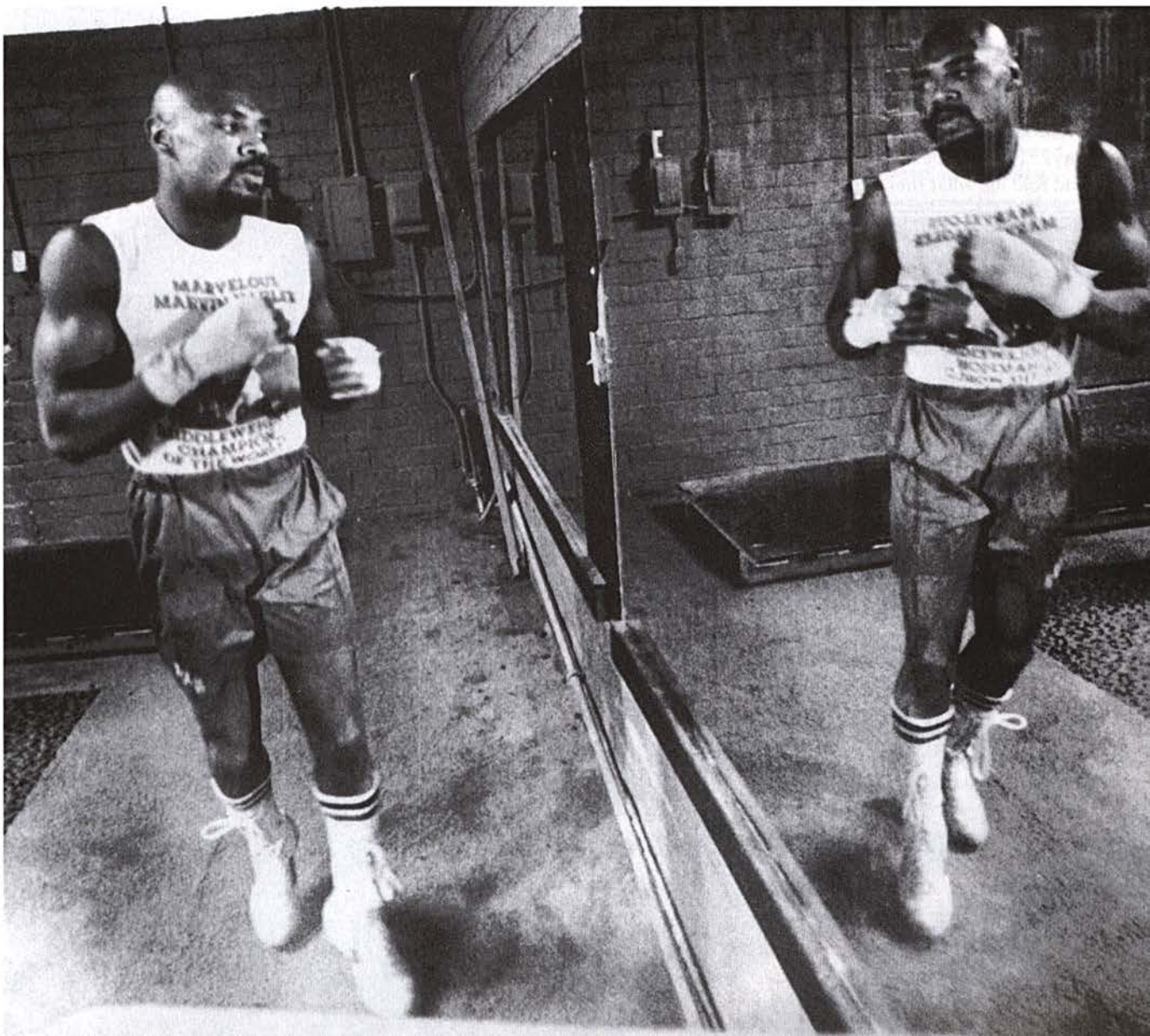
well be running a gym."

Many journalists were surprised that millionaire boxers would bother with such a decrepit joint as Tocco's. As Wallace Matthews recalled, "There was just about enough room for a boxing ring and a payphone." The ring itself was wretched, its ropes held together by black electrical tape. "The ceiling," reported the Miami News, "painted a hideous dark red, is pock-marked with holes, while the floor is a nightmare patchwork of blue, bright orange, brown, red and green carpet remnants." The neighborhood alone was repugnant, seemingly made up of abandoned buildings and liquor stores; degenerates roamed the sidewalk drinking popskull. At least once every 10 years there was a fatal shooting or stabbing nearby, usually the result of robberies gone wrong. "This is one of those transient neighborhoods," Tocco once said, explaining that he'd installed a special gate with a buzzer to keep the riffraff out. "The bus station is just around the corner. You get some of those bums around here, they haven't had a bath for 30 days, they're covered with blood, they walk in off the street and want to take a shower. Forget it. This way I let who I want into the place."

Hagler loved the isolation of Tocco's and the unique aroma one reporter described as a mix of coffee grounds, dirty socks and sweat. It was a blast furnace, temperatures rising so high that the faded old fight posters seemed on the verge of melting into the walls. Regulars kidded that a fighter once put a raw chicken on a plate in the morning and placed it next to the ring; when Tocco closed for the night that piece of poultry was cooked. "When Marvin comes to train," Tocco once said, "he stands outside that back door, shaking the bars, and yelling to me: 'Warden! Warden! Let me in, warden!'"

Hagler liked Tocco's because it reminded him of the early days in Brockton. "My life don't change just 'cause I got successful," he said. "You ain't gonna see me out there like it's a circus, showboating, putting on a show for everybody, acting real cute, looking at all the beautiful women around and showing off. You know

Despite his star status, Hagler was at home in rough confines.



BOSTON GLOBE

what I mean."

"Tocco's wasn't flashy, but it was good for us," remembered Tony Petronelli. "We wanted to keep things quiet and get Marvin ready. It could be a little bit of a challenge to keep people away."

Mike Bruton of the Philadelphia Inquirer was one of the few journalists allowed in. Like a field reporter relaying grim images from the war front, he described Bobby Watts wearing padding to protect his sore ribs from Hagler's sledgehammer attack. Detroit columnist Mike Downey reported a visit to Tocco's where Hagler and Watts sparred "as if the championship were at stake this very night."

To Watts, though, Hagler was merely a fighter in training.

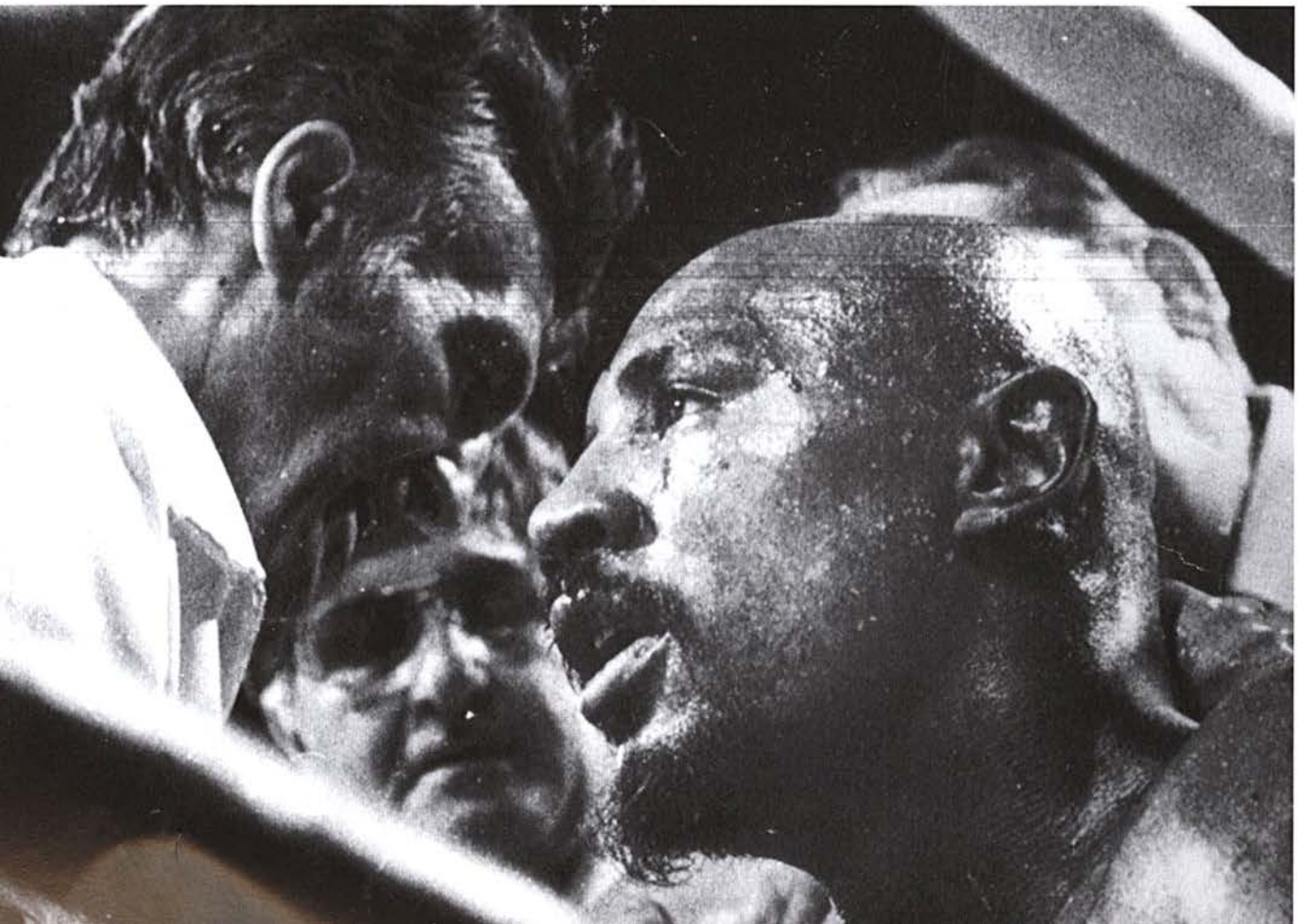
"It was a great experience," Watts recalled in 2020. "Later in my life I trained a lot of fighters, and I learned so much by watching the Petronellis work with Marvin Hagler. They had great teamwork. They were great guys. They made me feel at home and told me what they expected from me. You see, I was similar to Hearns in style. I was tall and slim, just like Hearns, and I moved like him. They used me so Marvin Hagler could get acclimated to that style."

"MY LIFE DON'T CHANGE JUST 'CAUSE I GOT SUCCESSFUL. YOU AIN'T GONNA SEE ME OUT THERE LIKE IT'S A CIRCUS, SHOWBOATING."

Though Watts had handed Hagler his first loss many years earlier and had been knocked out in a rematch, there were no bad feelings in the training sessions. "Marvin was mostly all business. In the morning when he showed up, he'd talk to you and stuff like that. But once we began training, he was all business," Watts said.

Hagler loved the image being created, that Tocco's was where he went to undergo a secret transformation. "The monster is coming over me again," Hagler said, relishing the bare-bones atmosphere. "There was a time years ago when I thought I'd have to kill somebody for anyone to notice me. And Hearns thinks he can hurt me?"

Since Hagler didn't go to Tocco's until the early evening, he made himself available to reporters in the mornings. He provided them with a fresh new quote every day, usually along the lines of how he would beat Hearns without mercy and destroy



Hagler remained loyal to the Petronelli brothers from his days as an amateur until his pro retirement.

The Marvelous One went unbeaten from March 1976 to April 1987 and made 12 championship defenses.

his soul. "When I finish with Hearns, he's never going to get his confidence back," Hagler said. When told that Hearns was gaining traction at the betting windows, Hagler barked, "I hope they have him 10-1, so when I knock his shoes off they'll know about it."

He talked about his future in commercial endorsements and his concern about Las Vegas judges, the ones who had given him poor scores in his bouts with Antuofermo and Duran. The question that reporters never tired of asking was whether he really hated Hearns.

"I have nothing personal against Thomas," Hagler said. "I just don't like him. What do you want me to do...kiss him?" Hagler explained how his feelings about Hearns were somewhat manufactured. "But I have to take those feelings into the ring with me," he said. "If someone tries to take your job away, do you love them?"

Perhaps the most revealing comment from Hagler was given to Phil Pepe of the New York Daily News. "My popularity is going to grow so much that I am going to lose my privacy," Hagler said. According to Pepe, Hagler announced this "almost regretfully."

For now, though, Hagler was embracing the attention. He was especially happy when an ABC camera crew wanted to follow him on one of his morning runs across the Dunes Hotel golf course. As he chanted, "Destruct and destroy," an automatic sprinkler gushed out of the ground and drenched him.

Being talkative in recent weeks had made Hagler the pet of press row. For the first time, he was entering a bout as the sentimental favorite. Most boxing reporters had for decades offered their fight coverage with a distinct hero versus villain slant. In this case, however, while Hagler was being depicted as the working-class hero, the villain wasn't necessarily Hearns. It was society at large, and Howard Cosell and Ray Leonard, and boxing's powerbrokers, and the press itself, and the networks, and the promoters, and the fickle fans, and boxing's peculiar star system, and anyone who had ever kept Hagler from being appreciated. It was useful to overlook his status as the world's best-paid athlete and maintain his hard-luck story. Hagler had told his tale of woe so effectively for so long that it had penetrated the minds of reporters and was bleeding out through their keyboards.

There was a moment earlier in the week where Hagler dropped his tough guy pose and answered a direct question with sincerity. What would happen if he lost?

"My kids would still call me 'Daddy,'" he said. "My wife would still have a husband. The world ain't going to end, you know..."

But Hagler knew that something in his life would be snuffed out if he were to lose. "This fight is the highlight of my entire career," he said. Hagler claimed Hearns could lose and simply go back to being the junior middleweight titleholder, but the consequences of his own loss would be bleaker.

"If I lose," Hagler said, "I have nothing."

MICHAEL NUNN: GREATEST HITS

FOR A BRIEF PERIOD IN THE LATE 1980s AND EARLY 1990s, MICHAEL NUNN WAS THE NO. 1 MIDDLEWEIGHT AND AMONG THE POUND-FOR-POUND BEST

By **Anson Wainwright**

Michael Nunn is a special version of boxing's "what if" story. He had success, winning titles in two divisions, but his supreme skills suggested that even more would've been possible had he been more consistent.

Nunn was born in Davenport, Iowa, on April 14, 1963. He was one of four children raised in a single-parent family.

"I grew up on the streets; I was a street tough. I was always fighting," Nunn told The Ring of his early years. "It was tough for me. I had a mother who did everything to take care of me, lead, teach and guide me, but growing up in the neighborhood, I was hanging out with a lot of street toughs. That's why I was a tough guy – the way I was raised and came up."

His older brother Willie noticed that Michael was never far from trouble and encouraged him to attend the Davenport Boxing Club. There, the 11-year-old Nunn learned the nuances of the sport under the guidance of Alvino Pena.

"When I went, I loved boxing. I was so talented," Nunn said. "Alvino thought I had boxed before, because of the level of my talent. He told me thought of turning professional; it was just something fate led me to. I was born to box."

Nunn, who won three consecutive Iowa Golden Gloves titles, had aspirations of making the 1984 U.S. Olympic team in the 156-pound division, where he had a rivalry with Frank Tate, who had bested him in two out of three encounters. However, he was advised to move up to the 165-pound division for the U.S. Olympic Trials. Nunn did so and fell short, losing to eventual 1984 Olympic silver medalist Virgil Hill. He exited the amateur scene with a record of 168-8.

Nunn moved to Los Angeles and hooked up with the Goossen brothers – promoter Dan and trainer Joe – ahead of his pro debut in December 1984. Based at the Ten Goose Boxing Gym in Van Nuys, the Quad Cities native learned his trade fighting almost exclusively out west, winning 30 straight fights before facing old rival Tate, who had won the vacant IBF middleweight title that was stripped from Marvin Hagler prior to the undisputed middleweight champ's showdown with Sugar Ray Leonard. Nunn walked away with the belt after a ninth-round stoppage.

It was a dream scenario that Nunn had foretold his mother years earlier.

"I wanted to perform for my mother; I always told her I was going to be a world champion," he said. "I used to tell her I'm going to fight at Caesars Palace and I'm going to win. That was always one of my goals. To knock Frank Tate out July 28, 1988, in Las Vegas at Caesars Palace, that was like my crowning achievement for me and my mother."

Nunn made five defenses of his crown, one of which was a thrilling one-punch demolition of Sumbu Kalambay that earned The Ring's inaugural Knockout of the Year award

At his best, "Second to" Nunn was exactly that.

HOLY STEIN

PICTURE ALLIANCE

Angelo Dundee saw the potential for greatness in Nunn.

in 1989. However, he struggled against a pair of former welterweight champs in Marlon Starling and Donald Curry in 1990.

All the while, Nunn craved a superfight that he felt his talent deserved.

"They were always close," he said. "I had a contract for $7 million to fight Roberto Duran, but Duran chose not to fight me. That's not on me. I respect him and Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns and Marvin Hagler. I just wanted to test my skills against those legendary fighters. Unfortunately, I never got the chance to do that."

Next up for Nunn was a long-awaited hometown defense against unbeaten but unheralded challenger James Toney in May 1991. The two met in a fight dubbed "Rumble on the Riverbank" at the John O'Donnell Stadium in Davenport.

Toney was listed as a 20-1 underdog and lost most of the first 10 rounds in front of a sellout crowd. However, Toney rendered the scorecards moot when he landed a massive left hand in the final minute of the penultimate round. The punch put Nunn on his back, and the finishing follow-up was just a formality.

"That was probably the most devastating defeat," Nunn lamented. "I was ahead in the fight and I got a little careless and he took advantage of it, and I give him all the props in the world. James was able to do what champions do and capitalize. It was his night."

Nunn decided to move up in weight and met Victor Cordoba for the WBA super middleweight title in September 1992. Nunn edged the Panamanian in a hard-fought split decision. Not content with the nature of their first fight, he agreed to face Cordoba in a direct rematch four-and-a-half months later and won a more conclusive unanimous decision.

After three successful defenses, he headed to London to share an event with WBC counterpart Nigel Benn, hoping to set up a unification fight in the second half of 1994. Nunn faced gatekeeper Steve Little. However, things didn't go according to plan. Nunn had to get off the canvas in the opening round, struggled afterward and lost the title by split decision.

"It was a pretty bad performance from me," Nunn said. "I wasn't at my best, but there's no excuses.

"With me losing to Steve, it derailed [a fight with Benn]. But I still think we should have fought, because I think it would have been a great fight for the ages. I think it would have been a very interesting fight, the boxer versus the puncher."

Little lost the title to Frankie Liles in his first defense, after which Liles defeated Nunn via unanimous decision in Quito, Ecuador, in December 1994. (It might be noted that in the 10 months between facing Little and Liles, Nunn took an interim fight for which he weighed in at 195 pounds.)

Over the next couple of years, Nunn stayed active and worked himself into position to fight for the vacant WBC light heavyweight title against Graciano Rocchigiani in March 1998. Although Nunn gave a good account of himself, he lost a split decision.

Nunn (58-4, 38 knockouts) finished his career with six wins, fighting for the final time in January 2002.

On August 6, 2002, Nunn was arrested after buying one kilogram of cocaine from an undercover FBI agent at a Davenport hotel and was later convicted of conspiracy to distribute the drug. He served 16½ years of a 24-year sentence before being released on February 6, 2019.

"I don't really want to discuss that," he said before talking about his life today. "There's no doubt about it, there's been changes. It's beautiful being out with my family and friends, just getting back to life. It's better to be out here than be behind the wall, and I want to capitalize on all the great opportunities I have before me. I'm enjoying life."

Nunn, now 58, isn't married but has five children and several grandchildren and lives in Davenport.

Here's what he had to say about six of his most memorable nights in the ring:

FRANK TATE

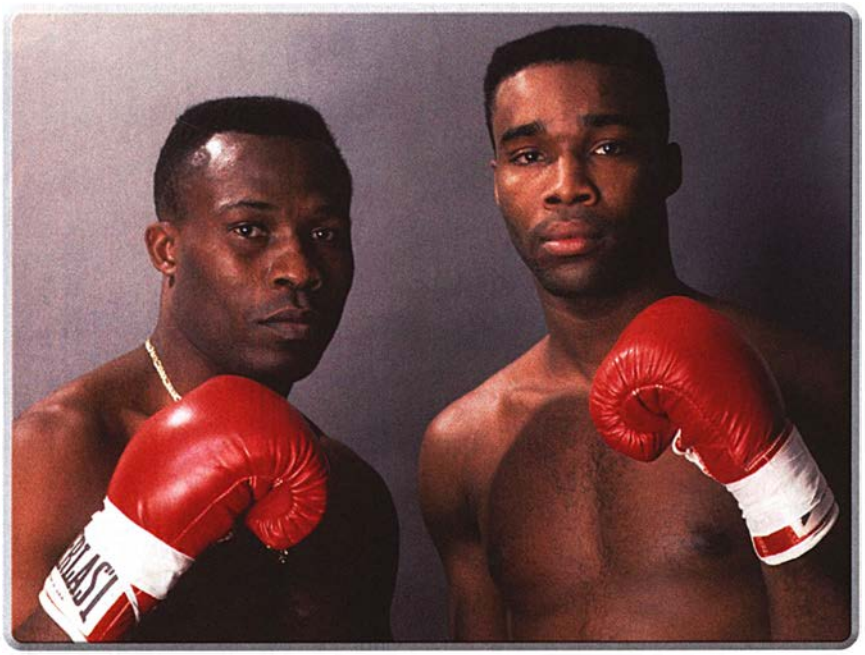
July 28, 1988, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas • Titles: IBF middleweight

"It was definitely a big fight for the both of us, due to the fact we fought three times as amateurs – he beat me twice and I beat him once. I felt like fighting at 156 as an amateur, but the United States Olympic boxing committee asked me to go up to 165 because they were clearing out for [Tate] to win at 156. They had Emanuel Steward in their corner, but I came from the streets of Davenport and just fighting; I wasn't planning on being a professional fighter, but due to the grace of God I was able to. Those guys were already structured in the pro ranks from the amateur ranks after them winning the Olympic gold medal. Frank Tate and all the guys who came from the 1984 Olympic team, they were already programmed to be professional fighters: in the right structure, the right coaching, money behind them and the right people. He was the 1984 Olympic champion and he was a good middleweight champion. I think I should have been on the Olympic team at 156. I had a chance to straighten it out, but I said like Dan Goossen used to say, 'They may have the gold medal, but I was a gold nugget.' [Tate and I] met four years later, and I knocked him out and I destroyed him. We'd already fought three times previous; there was no fear. Frank was a good fighter, he's a friend of mine, but I thank them for giving me the opportunity to fight, because they tried to evade me. By me being the number one contender, [they were willing] to give me money to delay my championship fight. I'm a fighter. I want to fight the world champion. The money looked good, but I figured once I beat the world champion, the big-money fights would come. He had to be forced to fight me; I became the mandatory challenger and they had to fight me. It was a good fight, but it was not competitive. I was the boss until I stopped him – I was quicker than him, faster than him; I landed the most punches; I was leading on all the cards. This was the second-to-last 15-round championship in boxing. We prepared in Big Bear, California. I celebrated the win with my mother and family and my manager Dan Goossen and great trainer Joe Goossen. A lot of people from my community, they flew out to support me."

RESULT: NUNN TKO 9

SUMBU KALAMBAY

March 25, 1989, Hilton Hotel, Las Vegas • Titles: IBF middleweight



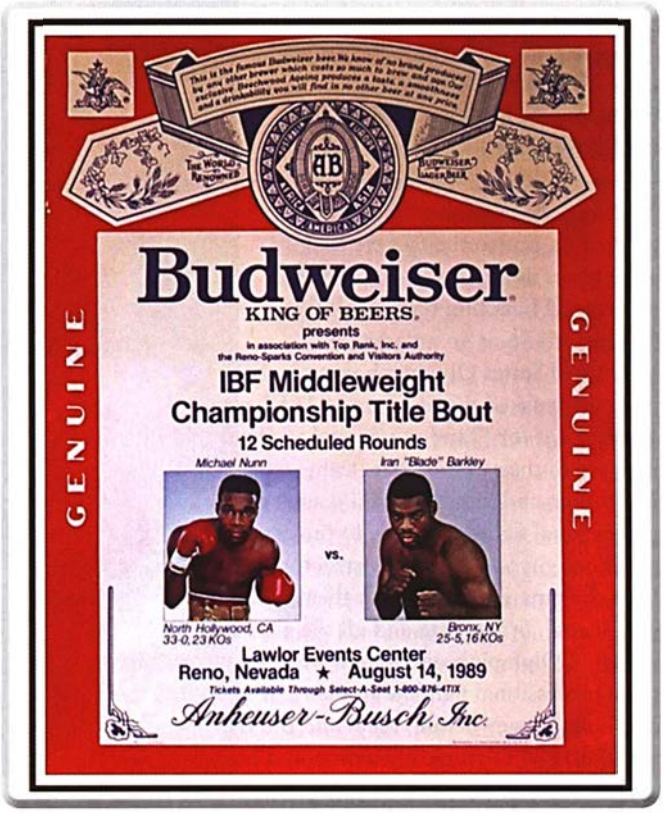
"It was sad; that's a part of boxing. I should have been the WBA middleweight champion as well, knocking Sumbu Kalambay out in a minute, 28 seconds of the first round. The championship belt would have been great, but it's OK. [Editor's note: Kalambay held the WBA title but was stripped by the sanctioning organization for taking the Nunn fight instead of facing its mandatory challenger, Herol Graham.] The world saw me destroy him. Just let the guys fight and let the winner be determined by who wins inside the ring. But with the politics of the sport, there's always the outside influences. With me knocking him out in a fashion like that – you're fighting great fighters; these guys are coming to fight; they have the mindset to win, like I wanted to beat them – they wanted to beat me in the same fashion. Fortunately, I was able to get the right punch off to get him out of there. Through the training camp, Joe Goossen had prepared me to fight 30 rounds. This kid had never lost to an American middleweight. He beat Mike McCallum and Iran Barkley, so I figured his mindset, he thought he d beat me too."

RESULT: NUNN KO 1

IRAN BARKLEY

August 14, 1989, Lawlor Events Center, Reno, Nevada • Titles: IBF middleweight

"Oh my God, one of the toughest guys I probably ever fought. He was so much physically stronger than me at that particular time; I was a middleweight and this guy looked like George Foreman come fight time after the weigh-in. Iran was a brawler. He was very physical, very strong and a tremendous puncher, probably one of the hardest punchers I ever fought. And as far as strength, he was probably one of the strongest middleweights I ever fought. He tried to intimidate me; he's a typical New Yorker. That's what guys from New York do. I never allowed him to intimidate me with my great condition and my physical abilities to evade the power he was trying to put down on me. I utilized my boxing skills and boxed around him and stayed out of harm's way. He landed some very devastating punches in that fight; in 12 rounds, you're going to get hit. The thing about it was Bob Arum would always tell me and Dan Goossen we would fight Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns. That was the last fight we did with Bob Arum. There was some internal stuff going on. I should have been fighting guys like Leonard, Hearns, but they kept playing games. But they had an internal disagreement."



RESULT: NUNN MD 12

MARLON STARLING

April 14, 1990, Mirage Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas • Titles: IBF middleweight

"Marlon was a good friend of mine. Marlon was a very tough guy for a little man. I commend him and give him a lot of respect. You have to remember, he came up to the middleweight division to fight me. He was the welterweight champion; he gave up a lot of weight to fight me. I was the bigger guy. He was really never a threat, because I was the bigger guy and he couldn't hurt me. He fought hard and he fought with a lot of tenacity. He wanted to go 12 rounds, because if you look through the middleweight division when welterweight champions move up and fight the middleweights, they usually got knocked out. If we go back to the great Carlos Monzon, he knocked out Jose Napoles. It was great [Starling] was able to go the 12 rounds. He didn't get hurt. He's a good defensive fighter, but he was never a threat. I have a lot of respect for him."

RESULT: NUNN MD 12

DONALD CURRY

October 18, 1990, Palais Omnisport de Paris-Bercy, Paris • Titles: IBF middleweight

"He's another good friend of mine. It was a real good fight. He had been the welterweight and junior middleweight champion and was trying to become a three-weight world champion. What he was fighting for was big, too. Donald Curry was a great fighter; at welterweight he was dynamite until he lost to Lloyd Honeyghan. Donald was a very good fighter, good puncher, very consistent and very dangerous. His manager, Akbar Muhammad, was good friends with Dan Goossen, and I remember when I turned professional back in the day, Donald Curry was the welterweight champion and I was a middleweight upstart, so [Muhammad] said in a few years we're going to put these two guys together and see who was the best. Dan Goossen used to think I was the best, and Muhammad used to think his fighter was better than me. It was kind of funny. And about four or five years later, we had the chance to fight and I stopped his fighter in 10 rounds. I got the opportunity to fight in front of the Europeans; it was beautiful. The people in Paris treated me and my team so well. It was a phenomenal night. Jean-Claude Bouttier, who fought Carlos Monzon in the 1970s, took care of us when we were in France. He was a true gentleman. He took care of us for the two weeks we were in Paris. It was kind of weird, but to get some European exposure ... to create some firestorm to maybe have a fight in London, I think Bob Arum and Dan Goossen were trying to get me a fight with Nigel Benn, Chris Eubank."

RESULT: NUNN KO 10

VICTOR CORDOBA

January 30, 1993, The Pyramid, Memphis, Tennessee • Titles: WBA super middleweight

"The first fight was very close; they gave it to me on a split decision. Angelo Dundee is a legendary trainer; he was impressed that I wanted to have a rematch with [Cordoba], because it was such a good, close fight, but I wanted to beat him more decisively. I wanted to give him a rematch and beat him more dominant the second time around and show him I'm the superior fighter. The [first] fight was super close because he knocked me down in I think the 10th round; he hit me with a straight left hand that put me on my butt. I got up and came on strong, but it was still a real close fight. I was pretty fortunate to get the decision. I felt it was my duty to give the man a rematch. The second time, in Memphis, I beat him hands down. I wanted to show him I was a much better fighter than the first time around. He was hungry and wanted to redeem himself as the champion he was, because he was tough as nails, a good fighter, and I have a lot of respect for him. I made better adjustments as far as my conditioning; I got in better shape. I was in good shape, but I knew I had to be in superior condition."

RESULT: NUNN UD 12

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

CORDOBA: HOLY STEIN

BRING ON THE THRILOGY

THE EPIC ROUND ROBIN THAT BEGAN WITH THE FIRST **ROMAN GONZALEZ-JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** FIGHT CONTINUES (BUT WILL NOT END) WITH THEIR RUBBER MATCH

By **Doug Fischer**

The Estrada-Gonzalez sequel mimicked the original – it was a modern classic.

Eddie Hearn is as prone to hyperbole as the next promoter, but not even his most ardent detractors faulted him for tweeting that the rematch between Juan Francisco Estrada and Roman Gonzalez was the best fight he'd ever seen.

While Boxing Twitter reverberated with awe in the moments after the final bell for the Ring/WBC/WBA junior bantamweight championship, Hearn carried his euphoria into the brief post-fight press conference where he was joined by Estrada, who had just avenged his 2012 loss to Gonzalez with a split decision victory.

Gonzalez, who many believed deserved to win the early Fight of the Year candidate, did not attend the presser, but his management let the intrepid British promoter know that he was game for a rubber match.

Hearn was still wonderstruck by the rematch.

"That was the greatest fight I have ever watched live," said Hearn, whose Matchroom Boxing promoted Anthony Joshua-Wladimir Klitschko, Josh Taylor-Regis Prograis and Carl Froch-George Groves I and II, among other major events and modern classics. "In 33 years of watching boxing, it's the best I've ever seen."

Hearn isn't alone in that sentiment. Hardcore fans know that a rare brand of boxing magic transpires whenever Estrada and Gonzalez share the ring, and they want another encore. They had to wait more than eight years for the rematch, but the rubber match could come together by the end of summer, according to Hearn, who would love to stage it at a packed Dignity Sports Health Park (formerly StubHub Center) in Carson, California, once COVID-19 crowd restrictions are lifted.

Whoever prevails in the third chapter of their rivalry won't have much time to savor the victory, as the winner is supposed to immediately face the winner of a rematch between Srisaket Sor Rungvisai and Carlos Cuadras (familiar foes of both Estrada and Gonzalez), per an agreement with the WBC.

At the start of the year, it was believed that the winner of the Estrada-Gonzalez rematch would have to immediately face Sor Rungvisai, the WBC's long-standing mandatory challenger. The former champion from Thailand has been patiently waiting for another crack at the WBC title since losing the green belt (and the Ring title) to Estrada in 2019.

However, the WBC realizes what Hearn explained to the small gathering of media at the post-fight conference: That the money is with Estrada-Gonzalez III, not Estrada-Sor Rungvisai III.

"I paid [Avni] Yildirim more [for his WBC-mandated non-effort against Canelo Alvarez] than Juan Estrada [made for the Gonzalez rematch], and it makes me feel a little bit sick," Hearn said. "I watch [the Estrada-Gonzalez rematch] and I think those guys should get more. But [boxing] is not a charity. It's a business. So, it depends on how many people want to watch the fight. More people want to see the third fight [with Gonzalez].

"The money that a fight generates reflects on the purse that a fighter is paid. It doesn't matter about their weight class, sex or race, it matters about subscriptions, tickets sales, commercial interest from broadcasters. I don't know what Estrada made for the first fight, but I'd like to think he made 10 times more, tonight, for the second fight. And I'm sure his manager will be asking for more for the third fight. Mucho dinero!"

That's something the WBC understands, and they're better at looking at the long game than the other sanctioning organizations, which is why in late March, Estrada was "elevated" to "Franchise champion" status – a political designation previously bestowed upon Canelo and Vasiliy Lomachenko to aid the pound-for-pound players in avoiding WBC mandatories that were not in public demand – and an immediate third bout with Gonzalez was approved.

To placate Sor Rungvisai, who had already stepped aside to allow the Estrada-Gonzalez rematch, the WBC sanctioned a rematch between the Thai veteran and Cuadras for their now-vacant 115-pound world title and mandated that the winners of Estrada-Gonzalez III and Sor Rungvisai-Cuadras II fight each other.

The Mexico City-based sanctioning body is calling it a "tournament," but they needn't be so formal. These junior bantamweights have a penchant for tough challenges, and you may have noticed they have history.

Gonzalez (50-3, 41 KOs) has fought Cuadras once, and Estrada and Sor Rungvisai twice each. Estrada (42-3, 28 KOs) has fought Cuadras, Sor Rungvisai and Gonzalez twice each.

The 10-bout series between Gonzalez, Estrada, Sor Rungvisai and Cuadras is arguably the closest rivalry this era of boxing has to the celebrated nine-bout round robin between the Four Kings – Marvin Hagler, Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns and Roberto Duran – during the 1980s.

The 115-pounders are accomplished, battle-tested veterans who fight with the style and mentalities of the Four Kings and other elite-level boxers of the '80s – displaying complete craft without sacrificing aggression for defense and technique.

And while nowhere near as famous as their larger 1980s counterparts, the quartet has done their part to shine a light on sub-bantamweight divisions with the help of promoter Tom Loeffler, who paired Gonzalez with Gennadiy Golovkin from 2015 to 2018 and originated the "SuperFly" series, garnering HBO exposure for Chocolatito and his 115-pound rivals.

For those keeping score, the Little Kings' round robin began November 17, 2012, with the only bout of the series not contested at junior bantamweight, Gonzalez's WBA 108-pound title defense against Estrada. The 22-year-old challenger from Sonora, Mexico, exhibited skill, savvy and durability that suggested championship potential, but the prime version of Gonzalez was an unstoppable force and the Nicaraguan's signature pressure and volume punching secured a unanimous decision.

Estrada, who seized the WBA and WBO flyweight belts from Brian Viloria less than five months after the loss, began beating the drums for a Gonzalez rematch.

"El Gallo always had a desire to avenge his losses," said Juan Hernandez, president of Latin Sports, which has represented Estrada since his pro debut and currently co-promotes the Mexican standout with Zanfer and Matchroom.

"When he became flyweight champion, he felt he could beat Gonzalez if they fought at 112 pounds. He always told the Mexican media the fight he wanted the most was Gonzalez, especially when Gonzalez moved up to the flyweight division."

Gonzalez stopped Akira Yaegashi in nine rounds, earning The Ring and WBC flyweight titles in September 2014. Four months earlier, Cuadras lifted the WBC 115-pound title from Sor Rungvisai via narrow eight-round technical decision. The unbeaten Sinaloa native took an early lead with fast flurries and fleet feet, but the defending beltholder's relentless

ED MULHOLLAND/MATCHROOM

pressure closed the gap on the scorecards by the middle rounds. A clash of heads in Round 8 produced a cut over Cuadras' left eye that sent the bout to the scorecards when it seemed like Sor Rungvisai was beginning to take over.

Gonzalez and Estrada defended their 112-pound titles in 2014 and 2015, chopping down former champs Viloria, Giovani Segura, Hernan Marquez and Edgar Sosa, but they couldn't reach terms to face each other in what would have been a glorious flyweight unification showdown.

To the victor goes the spoils, but Estrada and Gonzalez will throw down again in 2021.

In September 2016, Gonzalez supported his pound-for-pound credentials by challenging Cuadras in an attempt to become the first Nicaraguan to win a world title in a fourth weight class (junior bantamweight). He accomplished his goal with a hard-fought unanimous decision but also inherited Cuadras' long-festering WBC mandatory, Sor Rungvisai.

The rugged former titleholder got his shot in March 2017, and in one of the greatest victories in Thai boxing history, Sor Rungvisai handed Gonzalez his first pro loss, narrowly outpointing the pound-for-pound king in a brutal battle of attrition.

Gonzalez, whose trainer and father figure, Arnulfo Obando, died shortly after the Cuadras victory, entered the immediate rematch in September looking like a shell of his former self, a shell that Sor Rungvisai ruthlessly shattered in four rounds. On the undercard of Sor Rungvisai-Gonzalez II (the main event of the inaugural "SuperFly" promotion), Estrada scored a razor-thin unanimous decision (thanks to scoring a 10th-round knockdown) over Cuadras to earn a shot at the Thai conqueror, who turned back the Mexican's bold challenge with a majority decision in 2018 (an exhibition of controlled aggression that earned Sor Rungvisai the vacant Ring title).

However, Estrada gained revenge (and the Ring and WBC belts) by scoring a competitive unanimous decision in their April 2019 rematch. Now a two-division champion, and finally cracking pound-for-pound rankings, Estrada kept his eye on the ultimate prize.

"As time went on, Juan's appetite for Gonzalez grew," Hernandez told The Ring. "After he beat Sor Rungvisai, you could say Chocolatito became his obsession, his final loss to avenge."

But Gonzalez, who was written off by most of the boxing world following the KO loss to Sor Rungvisai, would first have to fill the void left by Obando's passing and then pull himself back into world-class status. He accomplished this, first by uniting with Marcos Caballero, who would become Gonzalez's new coach and trusted mentor, and then by upsetting unbeaten Kal Yafai for the WBA title in February 2020.

The stars were almost aligned for the dream rematch, but Estrada still had a few hurdles to clear – an October rematch with Cuadras, which produced one of the best fights of 2020 as the Mexican veterans traded knockdowns and vicious exchanges before El Gallo prevailed by 11th-round stoppage, and the lingering obligation of the WBC's perennial mandatory challenger.

In December, Sor Rungvisai agreed to prolong his shot at the green belt by allowing Estrada-Gonzalez II to take place in early 2021 (providing he'd get an immediate shot at the winner).

Expectations for the rematch were high, as they should have been. Estrada is pound-for-pound ranked and Gonzalez is already considered a future first-ballot Hall of Famer, and despite considerable wear and tear from multi-divisional title reigns, the two exceeded their first encounter and any of their previous ring wars.

On the same day the world learned of Hagler's untimely passing, Estrada and Gonzalez dug deep for 12 unforgettable rounds and gave the former middleweight champion a proper tribute that transcended any words that fans or media could hope to muster in their shock and grief.

For 36 breathtaking minutes, Estrada and Gonzalez exhibited what boxing is at its best: the most thrilling and dramatic of all professional sports. The back-and-forth action was almost too fast to follow but conducted on the highest technical level. The pace was beyond frenetic as they combined to throw a division-

record 2,529 punches, according to CompuBox.

Clinches? They didn't need any stinking clinches. Backpedaling? Please. Estrada and Gonzalez know how to fight, and both carried Hagler's creed of "Destruction and Destroy" into this long-overdue showdown. One could imagine the war master solemnly nodding his shaven head in approval from Boxing Valhalla as they pushed themselves past human limits in Rounds 6, 7 and an epic 12th. Hagler's spirit was alive inside the American Airlines Center that night.

Scorecards without controversy would have been asking for too much – the 115-113 tallies for each warrior were indicative of what transpired; a draw would have been poetic – but Carlos Sucre's 117-111 card for Estrada was a rude reminder that boxing is as much a poorly run business as it is sport.

That sad fact is one of the few things that hasn't changed since Hagler's era, but most of what made boxing mainstream in previous decades – great champions clashing to create great fights – seems gone forever.

However, the junior bantamweight division reflects boxing's glory years despite being under the radar of casual American fans and media. Estrada and Gonzalez want to make money, but they also want to test their mettle against their worthy peers, not just each other. Both have stated the goal of unifying the major titles – held by Kazuto Ioka (WBO) and Jerwin Ancajas (IBF) – once their score and WBC obligations have been settled.

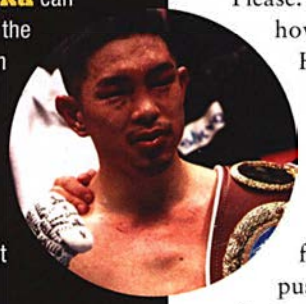
Hardcore fans lamenting Hagler's passing, or the gradual demise of boxing's popularity, can rejoice in Estrada, Gonzalez, Sor Rungvisai and Cuadras, whose competitive natures transcend business and politics as usual.

They've given us some gems over the past nine years. For all we know, the best is yet to come.

And that ain't hyperbole.

A KING TAKES AIM

If **Juan Francisco Estrada, Roman Gonzalez, Srisaket Sor Rungvisai** and **Carlos Caudras** are the new Four Kings of boxing, perhaps **Kazuto Ioka** can become the "fifth king," as Wilfred Benitez was to three members of the iconic quartet of the 1980s, if he's given the opportunity. The four-division titleholder from Japan, who possesses the WBO 115-pound belt, cracked the pound-for-pound rankings with an eighth-round stoppage of Kosei Tanaka on New Year's Eve. Ioka has faced McWilliams Arroyo, Donnie Nietes, Aston Palicte, Jeyvier Cintron and Tanaka since entering the 115-pound division in 2018. Ioka, who says he wants to unify all the major titles, recently gave his take on The Ring's junior bantamweight rankings:



Champion – Juan Francisco Estrada (42-3, 28 KOs): "Estrada is a very versatile fighter. He can move and his counter is very good."

1. Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (50-5-1, 43 KOs): "The most physical and powerful boxer in our division."

2. Roman Gonzalez (50-3, 41 KOs): "Roman Gonzalez brings his own legendary brand, which has always been a tight, high guard and pressure on his opponents, going forward with great body-head combinations."

3. Kazuto Ioka (26-2, 15 KOs): "I am versatile. I can fight on the outside or slug it out. I'm a fighter that dissects his opponents and wears them down."

4. Jerwin Ancajas (32-1-2, 22 KOs): "A southpaw with lots of bounce and twitch. His punch is strong and deceptive."

5. Khalid Yafai (26-1, 15 KOs): "He is a very balanced fighter in all aspects of boxing. I really think he is a good fighter."

6. Joshua Franco (17-1-2, 8 KOs): "Whenever someone is always labeled an 'underdog,' that fighter is dangerous. That is how I view Franco. He's a young fighter eager to prove that he is a champion."

7. Francisco Rodriguez Jr. (34-4-1, 24 KOs): "In 2015 (at 108 pounds), he went the 12-round distance with Donnie Nietes and lost, then he lost 12-round split decision to Moises Fuentes in his next fight. He probably learned a lot from those fights and hasn't lost since."

8. Andrew Moloney (21-1, 14 KOs): "I haven't watched any of his fights, so I cannot comment."

9. Jeyvier Cintron (11-1, 5 KOs): "The most athletic fighter in our division, a southpaw with long reach, great lateral movement, very fast hands. He was a very difficult fighter for me."

10. Carlos Cuadras (39-4-1, 27 KOs): "Tough, aggressive fighter with very good skills to complement his style. He has only lost to very tough opponents: Gonzalez, Estrada, [McWilliams] Arroyo and Estrada [again]."

Interview by Anson Wainwright, translations provided by Ioka's international manager, Taku Nagashima.

NO DOUBT

WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPION **JESSICA MCCASKILL** SILENCED THE SKEPTICS WITH A CLEAR-CUT VICTORY IN HER REMATCH WITH **CECILIA BRAEKHUS** AND IS NOW TURNING HER ATTENTION TO THE TWO BIGGEST NAMES IN WOMEN'S BOXING

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

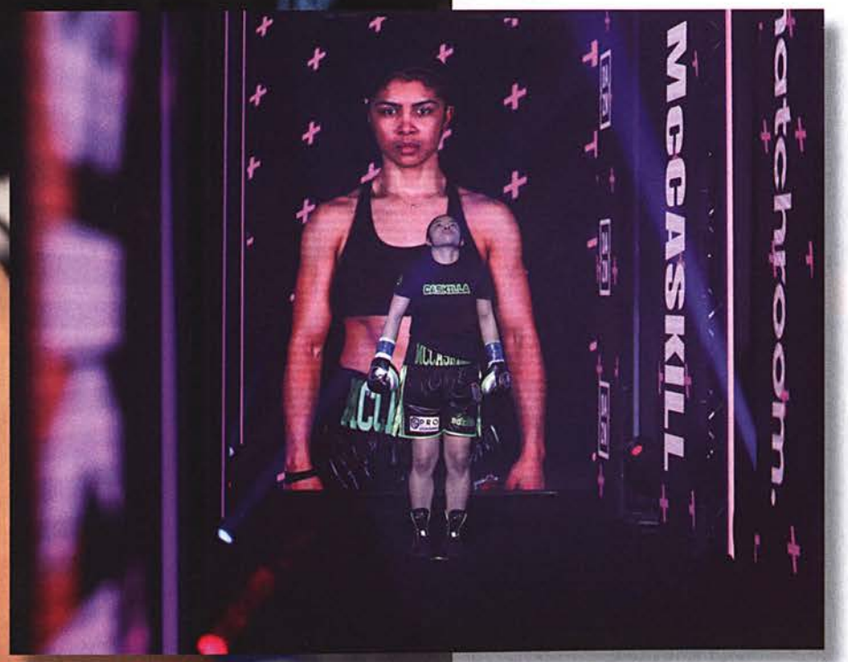
The first time Jessica McCaskill stood in a ring after a 10-round fight with longtime welterweight champion Cecilia Braekhus and waited to hear three judges decide her fate, it wasn't a foregone conclusion that she had done enough in their eyes to get the victory.

The second time, there were no such doubts.

"I was confident after every round that I was still up on the scorecards," said McCaskill, who followed up a majority decision win over Norway's "First Lady" last August with a decisive, near-shutout decision victory on March 13. "A lot of things that we had been working on, I was able to execute, and I could see that she wasn't trying to come forward unless she was trying to throw a flurry, but she was mostly opening herself up for big shots. She was hurt in a couple rounds, so I felt very confident in this one."

The win, McCaskill's 10th as a pro, cemented her place as the undisputed welterweight champion of the world, put the inaugural Ring Magazine women's 147-pound title around her

McCaskill, now a two-division queen, seems to relish every moment in the ring.



ALL PHOTOS BY ED MULHOLLAND/MATCHROOM.

waist and saw her soar past Braekhus on the pound-for-pound list. Add in WBC and WBA belts at 140 pounds and the 36-year-old is already well on her way to producing a hall of fame-worthy resume, even if she doesn't believe she's gotten true respect for her accomplishments.

"Not necessarily, because we did have to do this twice for it to really, really count," she said of the two fights with Braekhus. "So that has a bit of an annoyance to it. The last time, everything was really exciting for the team, just to be able to get the win, and this time, it was just like, 'You guys asked for it, so here ya go. Take it, and we're gone.'"

McCaskill's coach and manager, Rick Ramos, agrees, but the dynamic duo from Chicago isn't about to stop doing what got them here in the first place, and that's being the aggressive underdogs willing to take the big risks in order to reap the biggest rewards.

"Yes, I feel we have to keep that same energy and redirect it in different places," McCaskill said. "I have to be vocal and use that same energy of aggressiveness to expose people and really solidify why I am where I am."

And from here on out, McCaskill isn't interested in tune-ups, keep-busy bouts or mandatories. She's all about the big fights and nothing else.

"I felt like ever since the first WBC fight (against Erica Farias in 2018), we could only go up," she said. "You want to go up and do better things and expand your resume in a positive way. I'm looking for big things, and as we go along, it gets a little harder to make sure the next one is even bigger. But that's why I have Rick."

Not surprisingly, Ramos is already thinking big for his fighter's next trip to the ring, and whether that's figuratively with a Katie Taylor rematch or literally with a showdown against multi-division queen Claressa Shields, it's clear that there will be no steps taken backwards if Team McCaskill has its way.

First order of business, a bout with undisputed lightweight champion Taylor, who was the last person to beat McCaskill back in December 2017.

"Everybody's talking about the Katie Taylor fight," said McCaskill, who gave the Ireland native one of her toughest battles before losing a 10-round decision. "I know the fans want to see it; they've been asking

McCaskill was even more effective against Braekhus in their rematch.

for it for years. I get so many messages from people from different countries and people from Ireland and they tell me that they're Taylor fans, but they love that fight, and I've been growing on people over the years. I just think it's a big fight that boxing needs to have, so if they're ready for it, then we can start negotiations."

That's where Ramos comes in, and while he's gone toe-to-toe with Matchroom Boxing boss Eddie Hearn over the years, he's ultimately found a way to get the deals he's wanted for his fighter. And he wants a Taylor fight.

"I have to go all-in on Katie or Claressa," said Ramos, who looks at Shields as a realistic Plan B because he doesn't believe Taylor's upcoming bout with Natasha Jonas is a slam-dunk win for the pride of Bray. "I think it's 60-40 Katie with Jonas. That's too close for comfort for me to lose a megafight with Katie Taylor, but if Eddie wants to risk it, he's crazy, because I don't think that's a guaranteed win. But I think I should focus on the Katie fight and get Jessica over a million dollars for that fight. And this will be the first time two female fighters make a million dollars each, and it will sell itself. Both of them are different fighters. I don't think Katie got worse [since the 2017 fight], but I definitely don't think she got better, and the percentage of Jessica's improvement versus Katie's is dramatic. At the right weight, I think we beat her."

Ramos believes Hearn will ask for a 141-pound catchweight for the fight, while he would be amenable to 144 or 145 pounds. That's what negotiations are for. But would Ramos accept 141 pounds for a welterweight title fight?

"There's a price for everything," he said. "At 141, I feel like I'm disrespecting boxing, but getting Jessica the most money, especially on a fight like that, is my priority."

In the dream scenario for Team McCaskill, the champ gets the Taylor fight, wins it and then waits to see if the two-time U.S. Olympic gold medalist Shields, who has won titles at 168, 160 and 154 pounds, can come down even further in weight to challenge McCaskill.

How much further? Ramos is looking once again at 144 or 145 pounds, but he's open to suggestions.

"I think she can make 147," he said of the Flint native. "She knows she can make 147. And there's no one for her to fight."

He's not wrong there, and for once, Ramos and McCaskill are in a position of strength when it comes to making the fights they want happen. Then again, the attitude at the Body Shot Boxing Club in the Windy City's South Side is unchanged. They're still the underdogs ready to outwork everybody.

McCaskill was back to work as soon as she got back home from Dallas after the Braekhus rematch, and Ramos was right there with her. It's just what they do. And all the belts in the world won't change that. He recalls the early days of McCaskill's career, when no one wanted to give them the time of day.

CasKILLA claimed the inaugural women's Ring Magazine welterweight title.

"I used to email the WBC, the IBF, the WBO, all of them, every Thursday to get Jessica ranked," Ramos said. "This went on for six months. And finally, I think it was the WBC, they were so tired of me emailing them that they ranked her like 14th, and there was nobody in the eighth spot to the 13th spot. It was all blank, and in the 14th spot was Jessica. After that, I felt like I won."

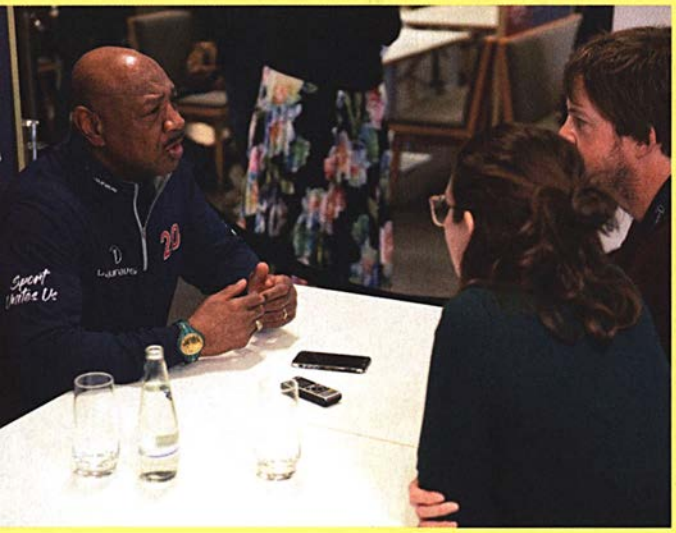
He laughs. There have been plenty of victories since then, but they're not done yet.

"I think [McCaskill] secured her position in the female boxing hall of fame with the second win over Cecilia," said Ramos. "I think if we beat Katie, Jess walks away, and if the opportunity comes where a Claressa fight has to happen, then it's gonna be on our terms as well."

Will McCaskill finally take a day off then?

"I think I have to say no just to say I didn't," she laughs. "Make everybody up their game."

WORLD BEAT



Hagler embraced life away from boxing, but he was always gracious with fans and reporters.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

RECOLLECTIONS WITH A LEGEND

We all loved Marvelous Marvin Hagler. How could we not? It touched all of us when Hagler passed into his eternal second, and nary a person had a bad word to say about the man and the legend.

I had several interviews with one of boxing's gentlemen outside the ring but gained a real insight into the man on a trip to Morocco in 2007, where we had gathered in Casablanca one night on a visit to a sports school for girls in the countryside the next day. Sheep's brain was on the menu in the plush hotel we were staying at and Hagler, there with his wife Kay, had seemed squeamish at the idea of partaking. It was an attitude "Marvelous" never showed any man in the ring in that remarkable and admired career, which has ranked him among the top four middleweights of all time by many observers (myself included).

But we dined like kings that night, with two-time Olympic decathlon gold medalist Daley Thompson also in the company on the sojourn to the Courir pour La Vie project, which was being run as a pilot program at Imam Mouslim High School in Ben Abid, a dusty roadside village 20 miles outside Casablanca. The program promotes sports among teenage girls living in rural locations, using sport as the vehicle to empower the confidence and independence of the girls so that they have the resources to continue their education rather than following the traditional pattern of leaving school in their mid-teens and later entering arranged marriages. Hagler was uplifted and inspired by the project as one of the ambassadors of the Laureus World Sports Academy.

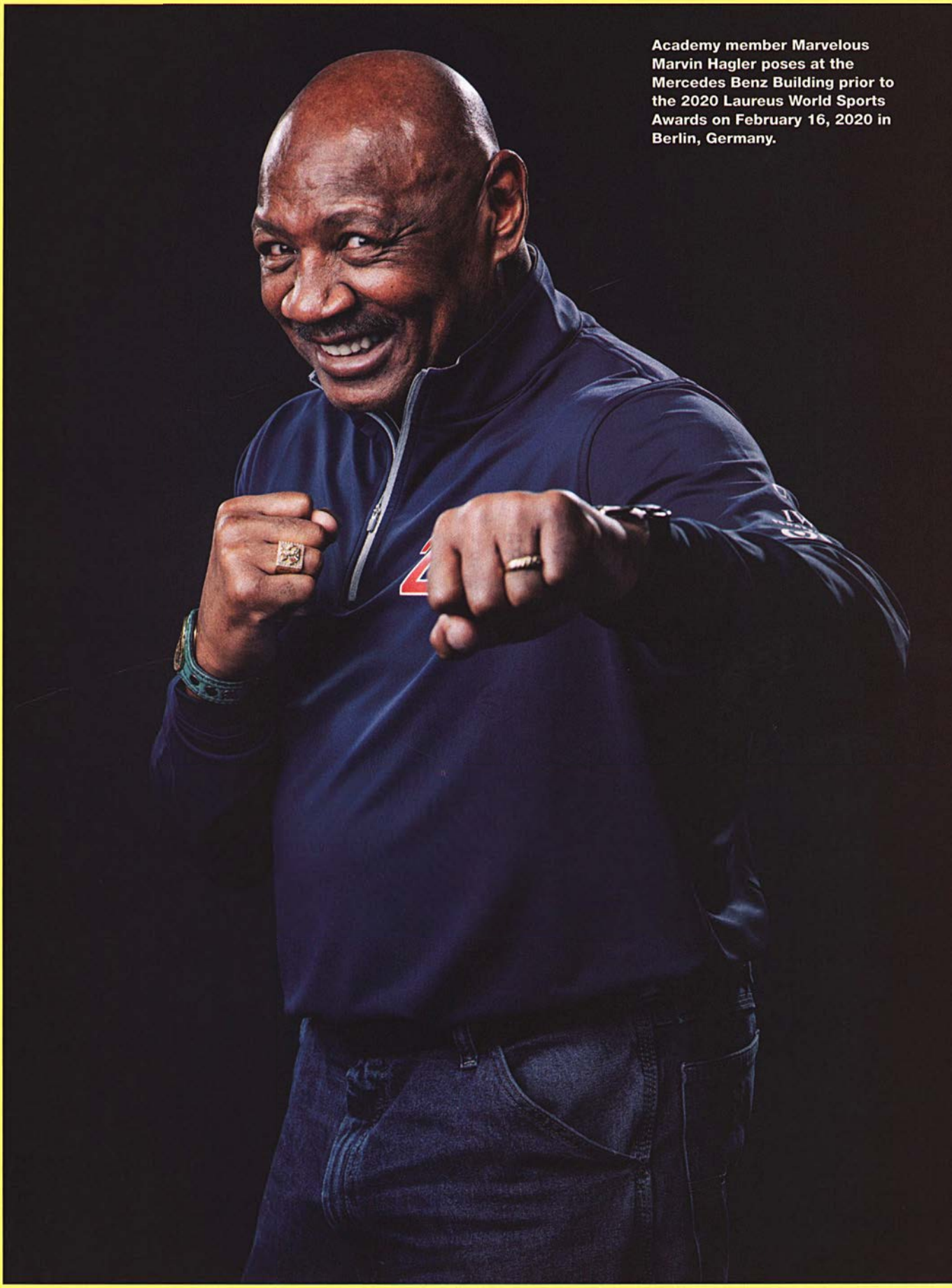
We talked, long into the night, of Hagler's visit to London on the shameful night that fans threw bottles at him after he had eviscerated Alan Minter in September 1980 to claim the world middleweight crown at Wembley Arena. Hagler, a wry grin on his face, recalling that night two and a half decades earlier, had let the night of racism, booing and violence pass. "It was a long time ago," he said. That night, in three violent rounds, Hagler had made his mark on the middleweight crown. We talked of referee Carlos Berrocal stepping in after Minter's corner had asked the Panamanian referee to stop the fight, and with 1:45 gone of Round 3, Hagler was the new undisputed middleweight champion of the world. On his knees in celebration at his triumph with Goody Petronelli next to him, within seven seconds he was under a hailstorm of debris and bottles. There was no presentation of the belt as British police smuggled the fighter and his entourage out of the hall.

The British Minister of Sport called the incident a "disgrace," and promoter Mickey Duff later issued a public apology to Hagler on behalf of British boxing. Speaking to ABC's Howard Cosell, Hagler, wearing a makeshift golden crown, declared "It's sweet, Howie; it brings a tear to my eye. I knew that one day I would be here, and all the roadwork and the boxing all paid off. I felt as though I learned a lot from the [Vito] Antuofermo fight; I wanted it real bad and I think that's what I did. This time, my motto was 'Take it from him,' and that's exactly what I did. I only had two things on my mind, and that was 'destruction and destroy' and bring the championship back home."

"It was a moment I will never forget for so many reasons," Hagler explained to me that night. I had wanted to bring up Sugar Ray Leonard, but it did not seem to be the right time. There were other views Hagler expressed, of his admiration for Carl Froch, in his pomp: "Yeah, I like him. I think he's a world-class fighter," he said. "I see that he's made it into The Ring Magazine as a top 10 pound-for-pound fighter after he won last year (against previously undefeated Lucian Bute). I've seen him in a couple of fights during his career.

"I understand that he's a little cocky, but with a fighter you need a bit of that. I don't know if he

IAN GAVAN



Academy member Marvelous Marvin Hagler poses at the Mercedes Benz Building prior to the 2020 Laureus World Sports Awards on February 16, 2020 in Berlin, Germany.

SIMON HOFFMANN

would have been one of the hits in my era, but what I will say is that he has a style that people like to see. He loves to go toe-to-toe, and the British, the Irish and the Mexican fans all love that."

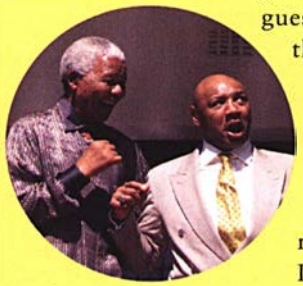
In another interview, he had views on boxers taking drugs and believed that the sport needed to return to the days of one champion in each division.

"You don't need drugs for courage, which is what a boxer really needs, so to take drugs and fight, for me, shows the person who does it is totally out of their mind and shouldn't be boxing. Period. For me, it's the same thing when people put stuff inside your gloves or use liniment on the gloves to get into their opponent's eyes."

In Casablanca the next morning, I found myself in the streets with Hagler and Thompson on a visit to the project run by Nawal El Moutawakel, the first Muslim, Arab, African woman to earn an Olympic gold medal by winning the inaugural women's 400-meter hurdles event at the 1984 Los Angeles games. El Moutawakel was then Minister for Youth and Sports.

On the way there, I brought up Leonard. Hagler scowled and growled, and I'm sure he said "pussy" under his breath. It was 20 years since he had fought the American idol, and the anger was still there about the way Leonard fought him. For the record, I had Hagler winning that night, 115-113, but it was a fight that divided the world. After it, Hagler had saddled up and left for Italy and a career in spaghetti westerns. With fistfuls of dollars in the bank. And he was still living there when he came to Morocco.

We toured the school, and we all took part in a basketball match against the girls, who played fast and aggressive, most of them taller than us. The parents, who had brought lunch for the visitors, clapped and cheered. A local zouk band had turned up and played their instruments in a theatrical, celebratory atmosphere. The mood intensified as Hagler and Thompson joined the players on court. It got rough. When Hagler took a break on the sidelines, we sat together and he turned to me, showing the scratches on the inner soft flesh of his muscular forearms. "Look at my arms. Those girls mauled me like tigers out there," he said. "They are fantastic. So committed. No man ever did that to me," he said, grinning, his eyes wide and alive. It is a moment with the great man that will last forever.



Hagler with then-president Nelson Mandela.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Marvelous Marvin Hagler will be fondly remembered by South Africans.

He visited the country in 1997 as a guest of promoter Rodney Berman, attending a card headlined by future WBO heavyweight titleholder Corrie Sanders, who was fighting tough gatekeeper Ross Puritty. Also on the card was Hagler's old nemesis, Roberto Duran, who won a decision over journeyman David Radford at the ripe old age of 46.

Hagler, commentating at ringside as a guest blow-by-blow announcer for a local broadcaster, made no bones about it that he had no intentions of coming back as he watched Duran drag himself through the eight-rounder.

After that, Hagler, Duran and Berman flew to Cape Town as lunch guests of then-president Nelson Mandela, who was an avid boxer in his youth and a massive fight fan. Berman recalls their time fondly. "I was really just a cockroach on the wall," he chuckles. "It was the most incredible afternoon. We spent a long time [together]. It must have been over two hours. Obviously, they discussed all the great fights in detail. President Mandela even gave them a bit of advice on how he thinks they should have fought!"

Hagler was also a frequent guest of the promoter when they were putting on cards in Monte Carlo, Monaco. "I had a very affable relationship with him; he was a remarkable guy," recalls Berman.

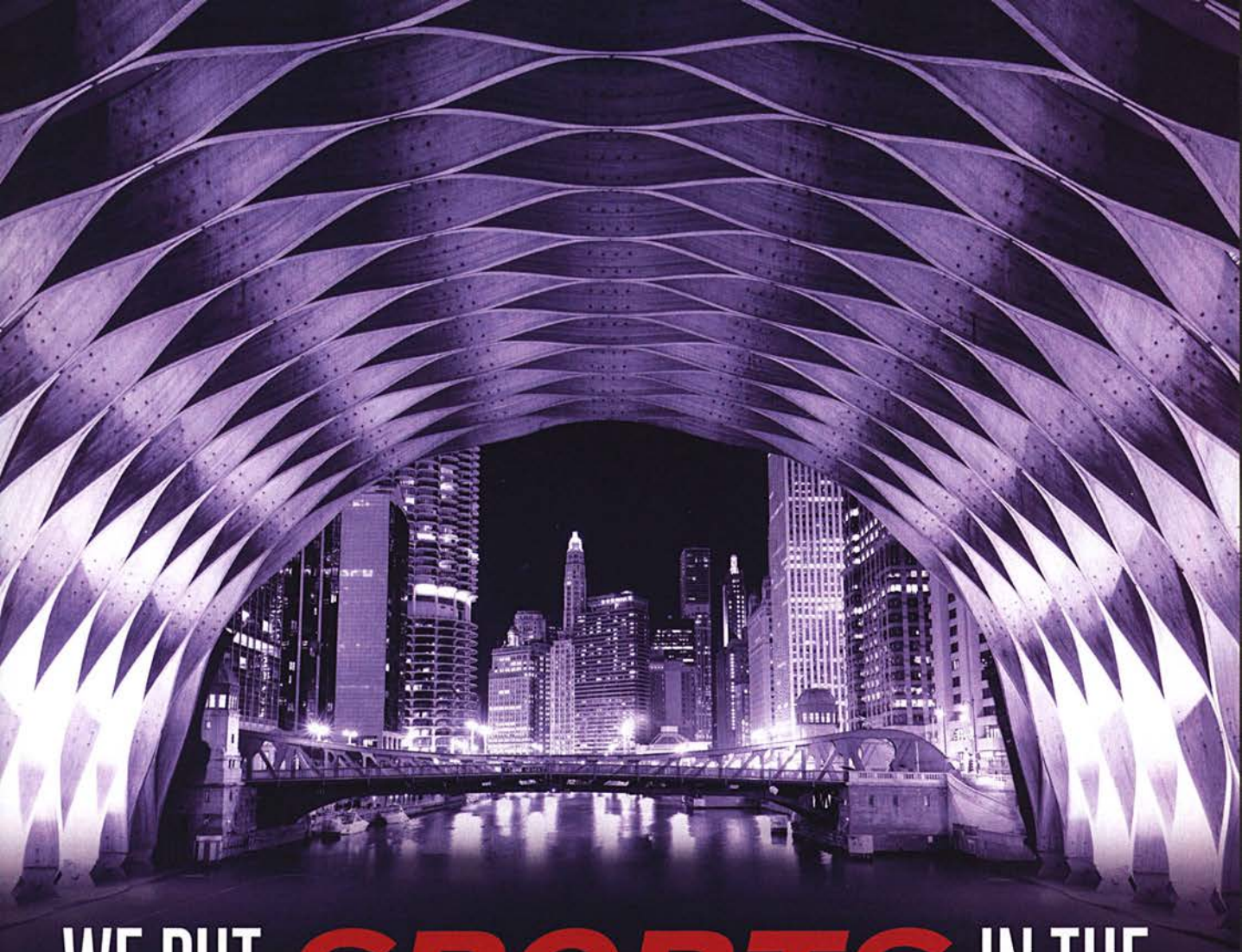
It would not be Hagler's last visit to South Africa. He undertook a private visit as well, which included a tour of boxing gyms. He was back in the country as a guest once more in 2001 at the Lennox Lewis-Hasim Rahman fight, which of course ended in another visit to Mandela, this time with Lewis in tow.

★★★★

Another South African who will forever be linked with Hagler is referee and fellow Hall of Famer Stan Christodoulou.

"I had the good fortune to be the third man in the ring in Las Vegas in 1983 when he defended his crown against Roberto Duran and witnessed up close the superb ring craft and indomitable spirit of both men. It was not the most exciting fight," Christodoulou recalls, "but it was a great fight, a classical fight. [Hagler] was a great tactician. To me, it was the biggest fight of my career, the one that really put me on the world stage as a referee.

"Hagler was a man I admired," continues Christodoulou. "I've been even more privileged to share a long and lasting friendship with him over the years since his retirement. As majestic, fierce, and ruthless as he was in the ring, Marvelous Marvin Hagler was even more approachable and loyal as a friend. I valued our regular catchups at the International Boxing Hall of Fame conventions in Canastota each year. The boxing world has lost one of its absolute champions."



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BERNIE BAHRMASEL

DOUBLE B SPORTS

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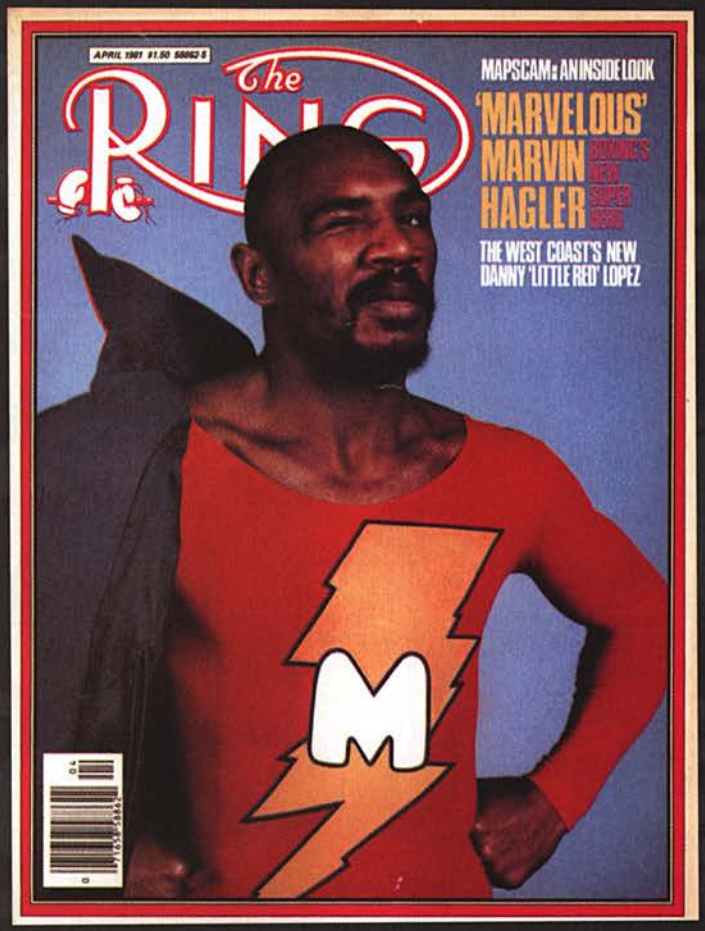
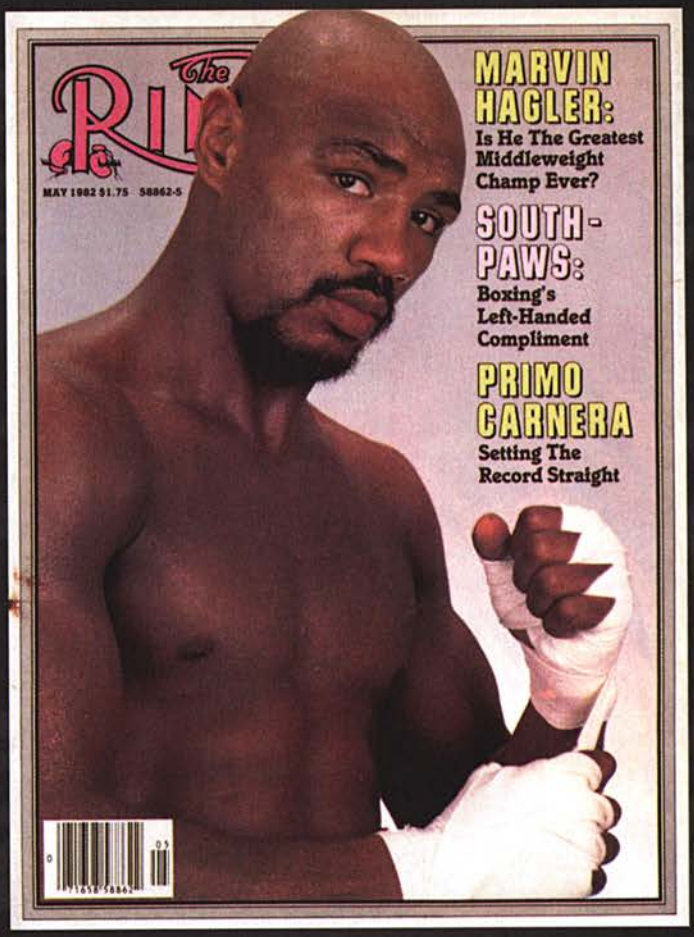
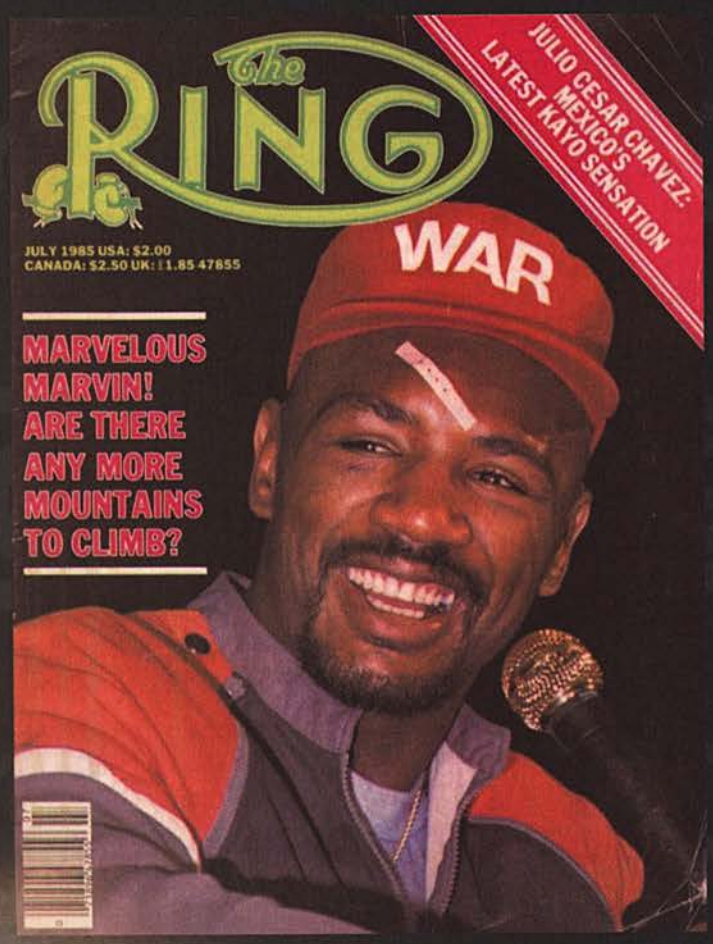
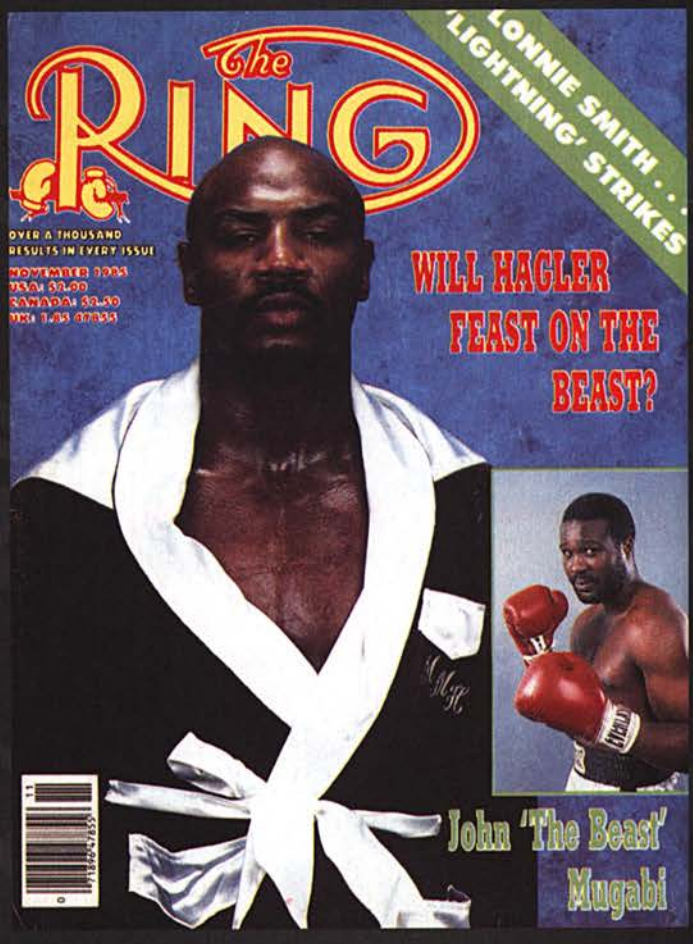
DOUBLE B SPORTS

FROM THE ARCHIVES

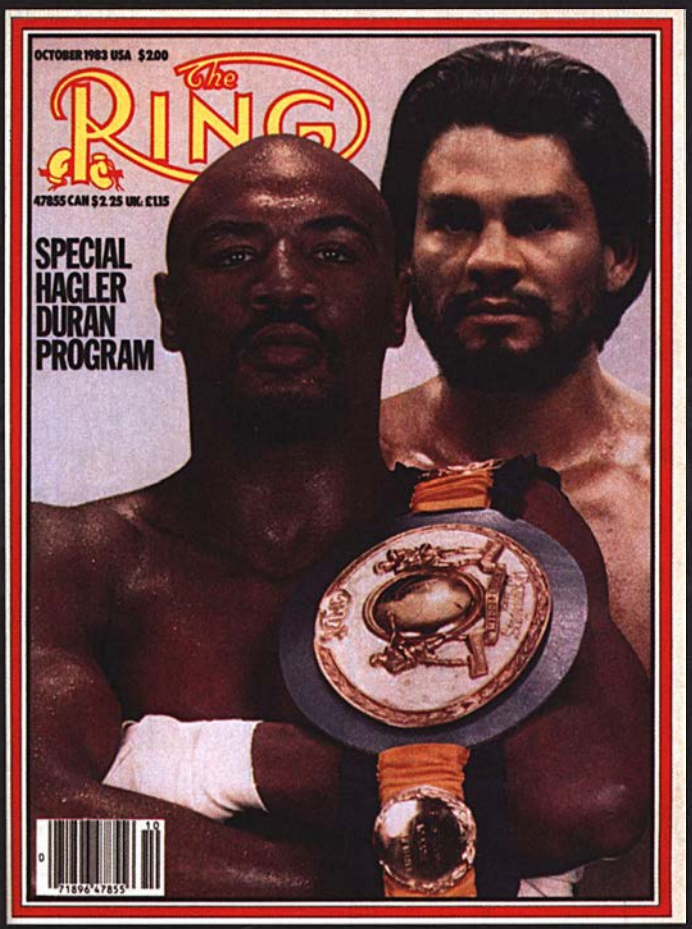


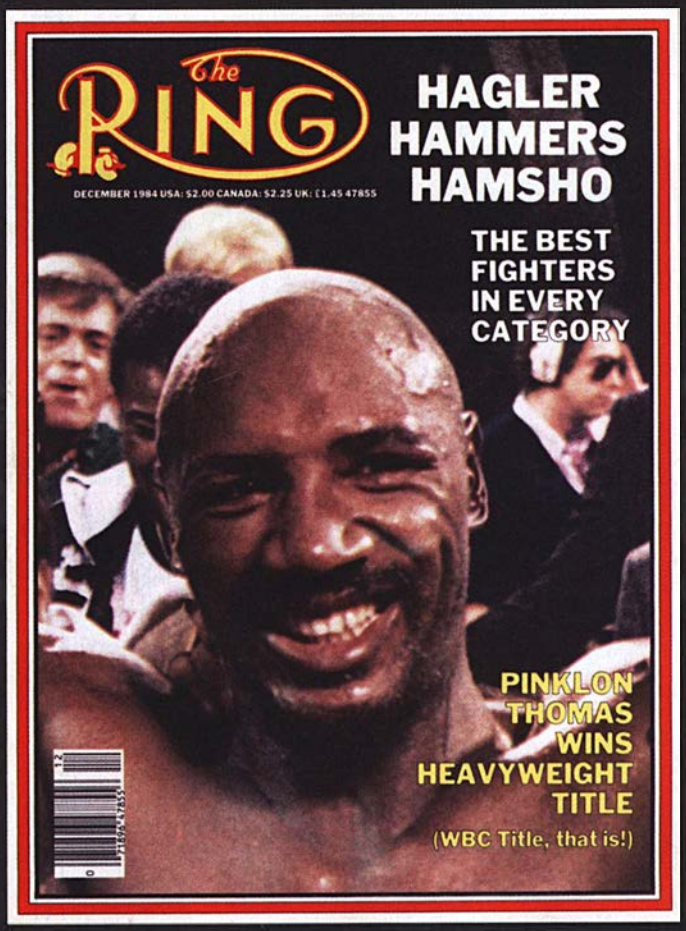


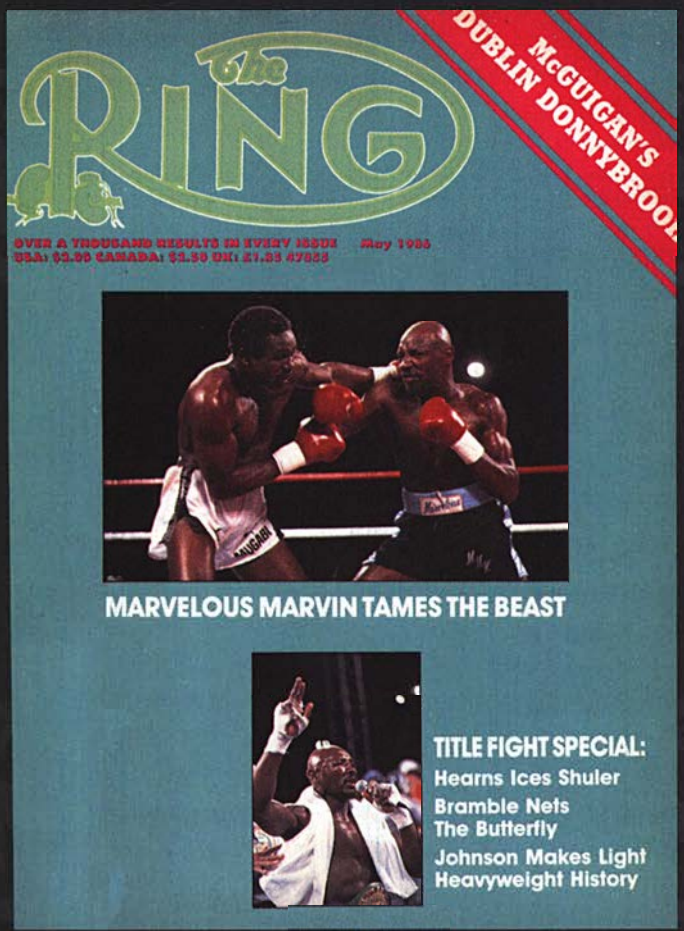


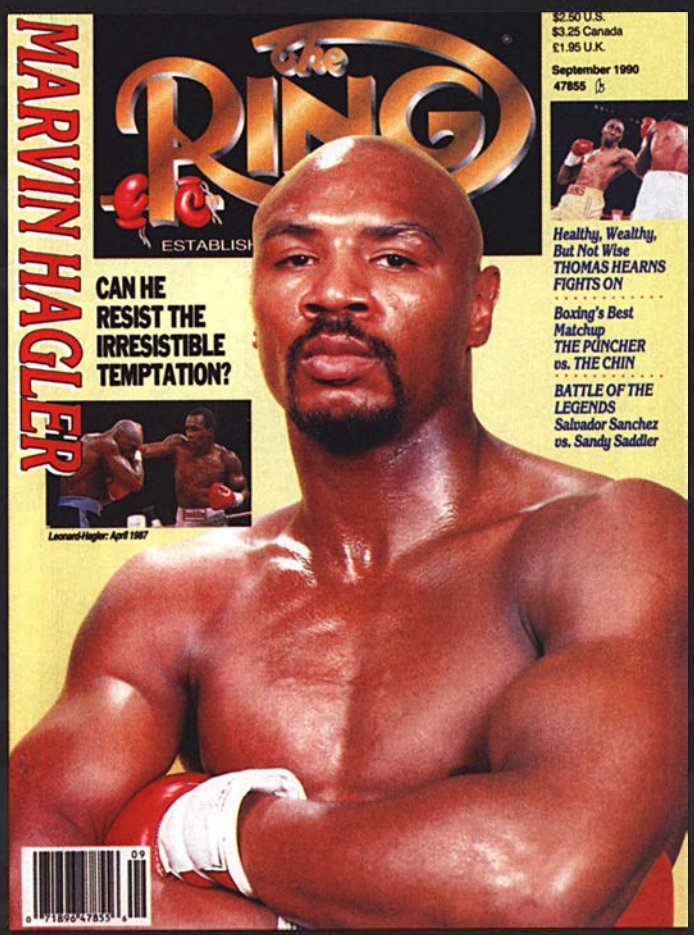


MARVELOUS HISTORY: The great Marvin Hagler featured as Ring Magazine cover star throughout his legendary championship run in the 1980s.









COMING UP

In a battle of middleweight unbeatens, Jaime Munguia will take on late replacement D'Mitrius Ballard on April 23.

APRIL

APRIL 23 – Jaime Munguia vs. D'Mitrius Ballard, middleweights, El Paso, Texas (DAZN).
APRIL 24 – Emanuel Navarrete vs. Christopher Diaz, featherweights (for Navarrete's WBO title), Kissimmee, Florida (DAZN).
APRIL 24 – Kenshiro Teraji vs. Tetsuya Hisada, junior flyweights (for Teraji's WBC title), Osaka, Japan.

MAY

MAY 1 – Derek Chisora vs. Joseph Parker, heavyweights, London (DAZN). Also, Katie Taylor vs. Natasha Jonas, lightweights (for Taylor's Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC/WBO titles).
MAY 1 – Andy Ruiz vs. Chris Arreola, heavyweights, Los Angeles (Fox PPV).
MAY 8 – Canelo Alvarez vs. Billy Joe Saunders, super middleweights (for Canelo's Ring/WBA/WBC and Saunders' WBO titles), Arlington, Texas (DAZN).
MAY 22 – Josh Taylor vs. Jose Ramirez, junior welterweights (for Taylor's Ring/IBF/WBA and Ramirez's WBC/WBO titles), Las Vegas (ESPN).
MAY 29 – Devin Haney vs. Jorge Linares, lightweights (for Haney's WBC title), Las Vegas (DAZN).

JUNE

JUNE 19 – Naoya Inoue vs. Michael Dasmarinas, bantamweights (for Inoue's Ring/IBF/WBA titles), Las Vegas (ESPN).

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